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LATTER-DAY RURAL ENGLAND



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Village Idylls

Etc., Etc.

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LATTER-DAY
RURAL ENGLAND

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by
S. L. BENSUSAN




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*I dedicate this record very gratefully
to one and all who helped
me to compile it*





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NOTE

Half-a-dozen of these chapters have appeared in *The New Statesman*, one in *The Morning Post*, and one in *The Observer*.

PREFACE

WHEN Sir Rider Haggard undertook the heavy task of surveying rural England, he devoted eight months to the work in 1901 and several months in the following year; he covered twenty-seven counties. He told me long afterwards that no labour he had undertaken was equally trying. "The trouble was this," he said: "I knew from the beginning that I could never come to the end."

He explored the countryside in a season of great depression, but even then he warned farmers and landowners—he himself was both—against the belief that there is but one salvation for agriculture—viz. Protection. "Let us cease to pursue this marsh-light," he wrote, "this phantom of Protection, and combine to secure moderate but effective measures of reform against which it cannot be urged that they would raise the cost of the people's daily bread."

I have always had a great regard and respect for Sir Rider Haggard. Whatever the task he undertook he carried it out to the very best of his capacity, never sparing himself, never seeking an easy road if a difficult one would bring him nearer to his goal. So I had some memory of the Preacher's words, "What shall he do, that cometh after the King," when I set out towards the end of April in the present year to see what might be seen of conditions in a score or more of agricultural counties within the narrow limits of time available. In less than four months four thousand miles were covered and many farms were visited. Long conversations were held with all sorts and conditions of men: great landlords owning, and sometimes farming, thousands of acres; farmers who had been forced to buy their holdings in the years immediately following the War and had been sorry for themselves ever since; tenant farmers who realize that the old landmarks have been removed by the march of events, and that their landlords are now, and must remain, powerless to help them; small-holders struggling desperately and often successfully for

the right to live; agricultural labourers doing their best, sometimes less than their best, since all are human, to meet the farmer's needs. Often I talked with their wives, upon whom a great part of the burden falls from dawn to dusk for seven days in every week; those who would speak their minds could say much that is worth pondering.

In addition to the men who are actually engaged in agriculture, I met and discussed the general position with the Ministry of Agriculture's District Commissioners, with County Advisers, Heads of Agricultural Colleges and Farm Institutes—all, in short, who are striving to help the industry through one of those bad periods which come from time to time and are associated with changing methods and imperative needs. To travel four thousand miles in the course of a wet and sunless summer, keeping so far as was possible in touch with every local aspect of the agricultural problem, is no light task; to sit down at the end of September and embody the results in a book that shall be ready for those who may care to read it, in a little while, is to risk a certain measure of inaccuracy, a certain amount of repetition and the omission of much that would have found a place had there been more time for reflection. But I feel that the industry to-day is more articulate than it has ever been, and that the outcry when this year has passed will be very loud and often misleading. Those who are interested may ask themselves what the real conditions of agriculture are just now, and they will find here at least an honest attempt to set them out with no prejudice in any direction, but with certain firm convictions. The first is that the urban population will never permit Protection to enter the realm of practical politics; the second that agriculture can thrive quite well without it, if only farmers will combine to help themselves instead of shouting at the top of their voices for State aid and for special advantages that are denied to the other industries that must struggle with them side by side. The fact the farmer has to remember is that his market lies at his door. His largest effort throughout the length and breadth of the land cannot avail to meet

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the demand for such food as he grows, and the consumer is paying a price that would, if the farmer could but obtain a fair proportion of it, enable him to live in comfort and to give those who work for him an opportunity of doing the same. Co-operation is the one safe means to the desired end. In a closing chapter I have examined the policies of the three great parties in this country, and though I am no longer in the Liberals' camp I have been forced to the conclusion that there is more in their programme than there is in any other to satisfy the actual needs of the time.

The Rural Report of the Liberal Land Committee (1923-1925) is undoubtedly the best and most significant contribution to the solution of the problem that has yet been put forward, and the means proposed are those that appear to meet the demands of the case more nearly than any other proposals published. The break-up of our present system is admitted by the greatest experts who write on this subject without any political bias, the policy of cultivating tenure met with no cogent criticisms from those with whom I discussed it. The emphasis on research and education is timely, the endeavour to promote co-operation stands a better chance of success in the future than it has enjoyed in the past, the housing proposals are sound, while, so far as I have been able to tell, nationalization of land has no advocates in the world of farming, and practical men see enormous difficulties in the way of stabilization. It is very easy to alarm farmers by talking of "hordes of officials," and this cry has been raised for political purposes in many directions, but when you begin to talk to the farmer, and enable him to see that he is going to get something from the officials in question, he changes his attitude. Not so many years ago he was denouncing agricultural organizers, who, after all, are officials, but to-day he runs after them with the greatest eagerness, because he knows that they have something for him that will help. Consequently I think that this cry about officials can be discounted and treated as an attempt to discredit an effective proposal. I

deal with these questions at greater length in a chapter devoted to them.

In 1902 Haggard, at the end of his long journey, was a little pessimistic. "Remember," he wrote, "that the foreigner has but one market for his superfluous store, the British Isles"; and he went on, "possibly after some national disaster, too dreadful to contemplate, a starving, broken generation may fly to Protection to save them; but that hour is not with us and let us hope never will be with us." He added that he thought Protection on foodstuffs would result in something very like civil war—"because it must mean dear food however small the tax." He said significantly that the middleman would see to that.

Even then he could see the pending failure of the labour supply, the danger arising from the departure of the best and brightest to the towns while the dullards, the vicious and the wastrels stayed on the farms, being unfitted for any other life. "It is this indifferent remnant," he wrote, "who will be the parents of the next generation of rural Englishmen."

Here one ventures to say that, up to a point, he was wrong. Pessimism is dangerous; the world has larger recuperative powers than those which we would grant in our moods of depression. Another generation has come, and is still producing bright boys and girls; to be sure many of them are leaving the land, but if it could be made worth their while to stay on it they would no longer suffer from lack of any interest in their lives. Since *Rural England* was penned, the village club, the Women's Institute, the wireless, the travelling vans of political parties, the motor-bicycle and the chars-a-banc have transformed the most remote corners of England, while leaving sufficient of their beauty to hold the hearts of those who are countrymen at heart. It is no longer true to say "the highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth."

Yet Haggard could write: "Nature in my experience only appeals to the truly educated"; he could see the passing of the landlord class and declared that in many counties,

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such as Essex; Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, landed property was a millstone. He saw the value of small-holdings, and that value has increased notably since he laid down the pen. To-day there are thousands of men throughout England competent to conduct one, willing to work the long hours and to accept the scanty reward, and yet unable to find the few acres they need, because many county councils are deliberately obstructing the movement in order that they may run no risks, since under the new Act they must meet twenty-five per cent. of any losses. He proposed that school children in the rural districts should be allowed to work on the farm in summer, a practice in vogue on the Continent and in parts of Australasia; to-day in some counties you may find the beginnings of work along these lines. He wanted to see copyhold tenure abolished, land transfer cheapened, light railways multiplied, foreign meat branded. Some of these improvements have come about, but where meat is concerned it is an unfortunate fact that much that is sent over to this country is distinctly superior to the home-killed variety. American packers, for example, do not send us worn-out bulls and old cows, while every country butcher and many an urban one will buy these if he can get them at a low figure. The last thing Haggard urged in his book was that an agricultural post should be established to carry packages not exceeding 100 lb in weight, and to convey all classes of agricultural goods, including milk in churns, at the lowest rates found possible without loss to the country. He thought that traction trains which would collect the goods at local and receiving stations and deliver them in the large towns could be worked very economically, and that the rates could be lowered some 75 per cent. on pre-War prices. Alas! the railway companies that chastised the farmer with whips now employ scorpions—perhaps they can't help themselves.

In 1910 Sir Daniel Hall undertook a three-year investigation of agricultural conditions. He spent the first year

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in Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Sussex, Essex, Norfolk, Lincoln, Yorkshire, Northumbria and the Lothians. In the second year he visited the Vales of Pewsey and Evesham, the Upper Thames Valley, the West Midlands, Shropshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, the Lake District and Ireland. In the third year he visited Wales, Cornwall and Devon, Scotland and the Midlands; his conclusions are based on what he found just before the War altered the life of the farmer.

He could say that in 1913 the industry was sound and prosperous and that for twenty years it had been slowly improving, partly because men had learned to reduce costs of production. Throughout his journey he found that the demand for farms exceeded the supply, and that the agents of landowners could pick and choose their men. In spite of anomalies in our system of tenure, and an occasional injustice in its working, he discovered little to complain about and he did not show himself particularly enamoured of smallholdings. He never yet met a smallholder "who saw any virtue in his holding as such; he regarded it only as a stepping-stone to bigger things," and where large farmers were handling their land badly he found that the small men were no more progressive. Of the big landlords he wrote critically, declaring that almost the only working part they took in agriculture consisted in the breeding of pedigree stock, and that "as a form of social competition." They were not encouraging their tenants to co-operate, they were not pointing the way to improved methods of farming, and he saw that they must be crowded out "unless they take some higher view of their function." He declared that agriculture was deficient in those highly educated experts who have charge of large undertakings on the Continent, and he came to the conclusion that the greater part of the land of the country is held by men who, occupying farms of 150 to 500 acres, are, at their best, beyond the need of teaching. "What the ordinary farmer needs above all things," he wrote, "is better education; and by this we mean not so much additional knowledge of a

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technical sort, but the more flexible habit of mind that comes with reading, the susceptibility to ideas that is acquired from acquaintance with a different atmosphere from the one in which he ordinarily lives."

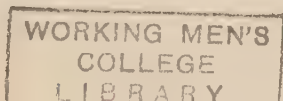
He looked to this larger outlook as a force for the promotion of co-operation, while holding that bad farming is often due to the low mental calibre of the farmer. Of State credit he said that if special banks are to give credit to farmers *qua* farmers, without a commercial consideration of the security involved, they will be used just so long as money can be borrowed from them, but can only collapse and demoralize. The view of so shrewd and trained an observer on this delicate point is of considerable significance just now. Of labour he wrote a pregnant sentence: "The farmer's general complaint is that the majority of his men are not worth their wages, and that is very probably true; *they will have to be more highly paid still before they will earn their money.*"

For a housing scheme he suggested that, if every land-owner could be compelled to charge four or five shillings a week for his cottages, and the farmers to raise their wages by a corresponding two or three shillings, it would be possible to build cottages as an ordinary business proposition. Had this advice been followed, one of the worst aspects of our rural life would have been altered.

For all the troubles that remain to agriculture during the years of Sir Daniel's tour he could see one solution, "More light," and there are few men in England to-day who can claim to have contributed so much as Sir Daniel himself to bring that light into the dark places of farmland.

I have recorded here the views of two considerable experts, men who have brought knowledge, sympathy and understanding to their task. Since they wrote, the War has changed conditions in all directions, and yet co-operation, education, cheaper transport, remain the chief desiderata of the years we live in.

On the long journey that I look back upon while writing these lines—that journey on which the sun seldom shone



and on which the rain poured down with an energy and determination worthy of a better cause—I found that conditions in farmland alter very slowly indeed. The industry is still beset by men of the type of the National Farmers Union official, who will be content with nothing less than Protection, subsidies or doles, who have neither vision nor practical knowledge of the world that lies beyond their own narrow boundaries. Farming is troubled further by men who persist in a practice that has become obsolete, and find that it is sanctified for them by tradition and must not be amended even though it lead straight to the Bankruptcy Court. We find others who, in spite of all the work that has been done to help them, hear of their opportunities only by chance, and when they do, make haste to take advantage of them, sometimes saving a desperate situation. Apart from the failure of the farmer to recognize the period of transition through which his industry is passing, and his lessening reluctance to seek and to grasp such means of assistance as are forthcoming, we find that he is being exploited in merciless fashion by every class that handles his produce. Here the Government might, could and should help, because it is not the farm alone that suffers. Only at the end of such a journey as is recorded so briefly here, does one become aware of the fashion in which our fellow-countrymen are being deprived of fresh food and driven to imports of inferior quality and, worse still, to things out of tins, in order that the insatiable greed of middlemen may be—satisfied? No, one should say stimulated, because these men go from strength to strength, careless of consequences.

The purpose of my journey was fourfold. I wanted to learn from landowners how they are carrying on, how they are meeting charges for maintenance and the general upkeep of their estates, how they are facing the problem of the farm that can find no tenant and must be added to their own. I wanted the farmer to tell me how he is meeting the transitional period, whether he is considering modifications in the old crop rotation, whether he is taking advantage of

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such new developments as sugar-beet and intensive grass-land cultivation, whether he is alive to the dangers that beset him in the markets, and whether he realizes the time has come when the claims of co-operation can no longer be denied. I sought to learn from the farm-labourer how he is carrying on in these days, when money has so small a purchasing power, and whether his children are likely to remain on the land or to seek occupation elsewhere. Finally, I asked District Commissioners, County Advisers and the Heads of Educational establishments what they are doing to spread the light, and whether those they seek are facing or flinching from it. In order, if possible, to keep the record from becoming too monotonous, I have set down certain conversations held in different villages with the world's simpler folk, so that those who are interested may see for themselves how workers of the rural byways look upon their special problems.

In conclusion, I should like to thank two friends for their valuable assistance. Sir Daniel Hall, who probably knows more about agricultural England than any living man, gave me a route to follow, and I may claim to have kept very close to it; Sir Francis Floud kindly gave me a general introduction to all commissioners, advisers and officials associated with the Ministry. The result of their kindness was that, in the first place, I knew how to turn my time to best account; and, in the second place, wherever I went in search of information I found an open door and a hearty welcome. If this little record is of any value, the credit is theirs; only the shortcomings and the mistakes are entirely my own.

S. L. BENSUSAN.

September, 1927.

P.S.—Where conditions have changed since the book was written, I have added a footnote.

January, 1928.



CHAPTER I

THE ROAD OUT OF LONDON

AS we moved through the ugly congestion of Edmonton, and turned to the right over the level-crossing into the sudden country, where rural Essex seems in some fashion of its own to touch, without defilement, the dismal fringe of the Metropolis, I recalled the far-off years when first I entered the county. There is a certain similarity between the conditions that prevailed then and those prevailing now. A deep depression had settled upon agriculture; the horizon was bounded by clouds; Mark Tapley himself could have seen no glint of sunshine. Wheat had been sold down to 19s. a quarter—they say it even touched 9s. a sack in Maldon and some other of the country markets. There were tens of thousands of derelict acres, weeds and rabbits held the old corn-lands in fee, and many farmers worked their land on an agreement that waived the rent in consideration of essential acts of husbandry, and the payment of rates and taxes. I paid one shilling per acre for many hundreds of acres of rough shooting, and my rent was just a shilling per acre more than my landlord paid to the hospital whose land he farmed. The labourer, if he had a large family, was starving on 10s. or 12s. a week; the mortality among his children was high; but in those days the urban centres knew nothing of rural problems; if the galled jade of the farm-lands winced, the withers of the townsmen were unwrung. I speak of the rabbit, but in no spirit of contempt, it is an animal to which we have never done real justice. On the waste-lands and the derelict farms of Essex it bred in tens and scores of thousands, and the poor labourer poached it before he went to work, and after he had finished his lawful labours. I am bound to say that the most of the farmers turned a blind eye to the robbery; they knew their men were on the verge of starvation, and as a class they rather despised the rabbit as food. I saw the empty

houses, the ruined cottages, the neglected fields, the broken fences, the countless weeds that brought forth abundantly after their kind, and I heard men who had kept their hunters, and drunk their bottle of port after dinner, declaring that the downfall of England was at hand, whereas, poor fellows, it was obvious to all save themselves that the only imminent collapse was their own. But, outside the circle of their friends, nobody cared. England had not learned the value of her largest industry.

To-day, there is trouble in plenty, and Essex, being one of the greatest of our agricultural counties, has suffered in ample measure. But it is fair to add that some, at least, of the farmers who tell you they are on the verge of bankruptcy still keep their motor-car and motor-tractors; they live in a good house and spend far more money than their father and their grandfather did. They buy much from the shops that was made in the house of old time, perhaps because their wives are so enamoured of labour-saving; their daughters are far above the hard work that is now known as "domestic drudgery." The agricultural labourer is poor to-day on anything between 30s. and 35s. instead of 10s. or 12s. The wheat that fetched less than £1 a quarter is worth something in the neighbourhood of £3, and the great markets of the Metropolis have been brought far nearer to the grower by the power of motor-traction. Agricultural methods have improved out of recognition; the county has its qualified advisers, and there is in the East Anglian Institute of Agriculture, at Chelmsford, a centre to which every agriculturist, be his business large or small, may turn for advice, in complete confidence that it will be sound. Moreover, the plight of the farmer is the concern of all three political parties. The Liberals have made an exhaustive study of conditions, which is available for use, and has indeed been used by other parties; Labour is striving hard to learn something about the land and is making progress in spite of an inevitable urban bias that makes for error. Then again,

while the nation is consuming more of the farmer's products, the whole world has taken to wheaten bread, so that the demand, Sir Roland Biffen tells me, is likely, at no distant future, to exceed the supply, while the new wheats, bred in his famous cages at Cambridge, promise to yield in due season an increase of 25 per cent. on our average return, given suitable soil and correct acts of husbandry.

Essex farmers have discovered that they have in sugar-beet a crop that may pay its way in a little while without subsidy, if only the statesmen at Geneva can raise the standard of wages on the Continent. A factory for handling the beet has been set up at Felsted. As I write, experiments in repeated grazing on young herbage seem likely to establish a system under which a farmer will fatten his stock with less than the usual amount of cake, and so, should he be able to meet the initial expenditure, to face the competition of chilled beef and frozen mutton. It is not unreasonable to say that conditions, bad as they undoubtedly are on the heavy lands of Essex, have not yet become desperate, and that if men of good-will contrive to forget party prejudice and to regard agriculture simply as an industry which, taken year in and year out, produces nearly £5,000,000 worth of foodstuff every week, we shall find that the problems, grave though they be, will retain no serious claim to immortality. It is hard to be a Victorian late in the third decade of the twentieth century, but it does help one to a truer perspective than comes to those for whom the post-War crisis in agriculture is the first of its kind.

It is quite easy to consider individual troubles, and to make false deductions from them, but there is a familiar saying that hard cases make bad law, and the plight of certain farmers, or of areas, that have been the worst sufferers under existing conditions does not necessarily present a true picture of agriculture. As we drove through fifty miles of Essex country on an afternoon in late April the state of the fields bore no evidence of a serious crisis ;

the fallows were clean, the corn was high and of good colour, though beans on flower had suffered from lack of rain, that was presently to overwhelm them with unwelcome attention. Stock not only seemed to be healthy but also of better quality than one used to see on small farms. Along our line of route, which was roughly Woodford, Nazeing, Epping Long Green, Harlow, Sawbridgeworth, Stortford, Stansted, Thaxted, with several détours, there was a marked absence of the class of stock that is never raised at a profit: the "nearly two-gallon" cow, the scrub bullock that won't fatten, his cousin from Ireland who demands from thirty to forty months for ripening and frequently develops liver trouble, the calf with rough staring coat, the lean and hungry pig. Most of these unfortunate animals have gone from Essex, never, one hopes, to return; the educational side of the Ministry of Agriculture has been working to good purpose; so, too, has the Essex Branch of the N.F.U.

It seems at first sight that the problems troubling the farmer are not those that relate to production, but rather to marketing. In short, he is producing good food and getting bad prices, while the consumer can purchase what the farmer grows only at a figure that would make the grower a rich man—if he did but receive his fair share of it. This, at least, is a very definite belief that has come to me as the result of twenty years of practical experience, and a close study of the experience of other men. It remains to put it to the proof, to find out whether the solution to the farmer's troubles lies in the markets or in still wider areas.

Late in the evening I drove through a village, where for more than a dozen years I had encountered the ups and downs of farming practice, and there I stopped and chatted with a couple of old friends. One is a man who started life with nothing and has made a fortune out of successful dealing; the other is the well-tried, practical manager of a small estate. The first gave me the figure of his losses in the preceding twelve months, and they

ran well into four figures: shrewd though he is, he had been caught with very heavy holdings on a falling market, had apparently bought to average and had been beaten again by the continued slump, due to the quarrels of the American packing firms. His rough-and-ready farming methods had failed him too; quite apart from losses on stock he had been forced to meet deficits on arable cultivation. He could see no future, and perhaps he felt his position the more keenly because he is a man who never spares himself. You may find him on the road at six o'clock in the morning; his only relaxation is an hour at the village inn after nightfall, when he sits among those who work for him, and chats about the tasks of the day that has passed or the day that is to come. He lives simply, and has probably never spent one per cent. of his fortune upon himself, nor would any measure of success prompt him to retire. The other man, grown grey in the service of the land, capable in his own fashion and as straightforward as the first speaker, could tell only of a series of losses since 1922, and could see no prospect of better times. Both cases have their value, because neither one man nor the other is likely to depart from traditional practice. I think the dealer will still buy a certain number of stores and spend money on fattening them over a long period; he will still farm a large area of land, following old rotations and giving no heed to new developments, because his time is too fully occupied. The second will persist in the fashion of farming that he knew when he was a young man fifty years ago, and within his limits he will do the work well, though perhaps at a leisured pace that is more becoming to the old times than the new.

They belong of right to tranquil seasons, these farmers of the rich valley of the Chelmer, where heavy land brings forth abundantly but at high cost, and there is plenty of shooting and hunting to beguile winter days; where men of old time made money without effort, and knew that in hours of need there was always a landlord who kept a good glass of port, gave his tenants a hearty welcome, listened

to their tale of woe, and granted a reduction in the rent. Then, too, there were always labourers who could be squeezed a bit when times were bad, and if they did not like to be squeezed they could go; there were others to take their place.

To-day, most of the farmers in the valley are their own landlords; the estates in this district have been sold; some of the great houses have actually been broken up because no tenant could be found for them, or have been turned into flats. The landlords are few and far between, and those who have stuck to their land, in spite of the opportunities to sell that came at the end of the War, have every reason to regret their decision. They cannot help their tenants: the burdens they must struggle under are so heavy that they find it hard to help themselves. One of the greatest, now with us no longer, *ehen fugaces*, showed me his estate returns one afternoon as we sat over the fire in his study. Charges from first to last took eighteen shillings out of every pound. The labourer is heard to complain that he is worse off than he was when he had the pre-War prices of 18s. a week, but in truth he has his minimum rate and his half-holiday; his children start work on the farm for the wage at which his grandfather left off; the standard of living is higher and the children go better clad.

"It's like this here, sir," said an old Essex labourer to the writer, when wages rose during the War to 46s. a week, and farmers, however prosperous, were complaining, as their fashion is, "all my life the farmer's bin sittin' on we, an' now it's our turn an' we're sittin' on the likes of him." It is fair to add that the good man had three sons all earning a wage equal to his own and all living at home; his wife was in great demand as domestic worker, cook and washerwoman, the total earnings of the family were then over £10 a week and the rent of their cottage was half-a-crown, the landlord paying rates. No income-tax surveyor approached their dwelling, to which the butcher brought his prime joints; other tradesmen came, so to speak, hat in hand.

THE ROAD OUT OF LONDON

I drove away from the village that evening with a curious sense of difficult times and changing values, with a feeling that men were really baffled by conditions that had developed comparatively suddenly, and had left them without landmarks.

CHELMER VALLEY, *April*.



INTERLUDE

EMPIRE DAY

THE old town of Thaxted, with its mediæval moot-hall and stately church that would have served for county cathedral had the place been more accessible, may be termed a purely agricultural centre, in spite of the solitary factory that finds a corner there. One would have expected to have heard much about the troubles of agriculture, but it was Empire Day. The Vicar, who, like Gallio, cares for none of these things, had tolled the church bell, in mourning for those who have been "sacrificed to Imperialism," and had issued a printed circular stating that Empire Day was opposed to the teachings of Christ, and that St George of England had been a martyr to it. In spite of this the town was beflagged. Bunting had crept to the edge of the vicarage, an indignant townsman had put up a notice-board with the Vicar's circular pasted in the middle of it and a statement above to the effect that, while it is impossible to put men who held such sentiments up against the wall, and dispose of them summarily, the loyal folk of Thaxted could show their contempt for these views by attending the Empire Night Concert in their full strength. Clearly here was a man who does not serve Imperialism for nought.

Rumour, with her hundred tongues, had found a use for all of them. There was to be a riot. The concert would be broken up by Communists and Socialists, the programme would be reduced to *The Red Flag* sung *ad infinitum*, the special interposition of Providence would be required to prevent bloodshed, and the presence of the senior magistrate was hardly deemed sufficient to ensure the safety of His Majesty's lieges, for the "red" Vicar (one of the gentlest and most sincere social reformers, who loves his parishioners) was on the war-path, and blood must needs flow.

After dining in one of Thaxted's many old inns, and

being cared for with the personal attention and kindness that are so hard to find to-day, we strolled out into the threatened heart of the little country town. The public hall was full and brightly lit, sounds of song could be heard along the road; outside the hall there were two young men who could hardly be said to constitute a hostile gathering, a more reasonable inference being that they were enjoying the concert free of expense. Where then, were the Vicar's cohorts, "terrible as an army with banners"? We turned from the town hall, and strolled along the quiet road to the vicarage; the air was heavy with the scent of the beanfields and flowering white-thorn, the night was still and clear and starlit. From the vicarage came the sound of music, but it was not of the martial kind; hymns were being practised to an accompaniment of piano and strings. Clearly the battle was not joined; there was no imminent action along hostile lines. In a little while we returned to the inn and retired, and when, perhaps an hour later, the concert came to an end, a considerable company passed the house in happiest converse, just as though England were full of prosperity and empty of ill-will. Certainly if Thaxted on Empire Night were a fair sample, the lovers of England are justified in the faith that is in them.

Early on the following morning I visited an elderly labourer who is the head man of a group of farms, in order to hear what he had to say. Unfortunately he was detained by some work, but his wife was at home, and she told us that he had not been "quite himself" for some time past. "You know, sir," she said, "if the farms are not going well, George gets worried; if he finds that the weeds are getting ahead of him or the crops are not coming up as they should, he goes off his food. You understand," she went on, "he has been working on the land for so long that it seems to belong to him; if there is anything amiss, he feels he ought to be able to put it right."

Here, surely, is another type of the farm-hand that will leave no successor, and I remembered, suddenly, how, on

the previous evening, I had met the only son of a man who farms a very ample acreage and whose father and grandfather before him held the same farm. This lad, strong, sturdy, and in his early twenties, has decided that the game is not worth the candle, so has gone into some motor-works. As you go up and down the country to-day, and visit a garage for petrol or parts, or tyre-mending, or any of the minor troubles that are to be met on the road, you will find that the lads who are doing the hard work so cheerfully are the sons of small farmers and farm-labourers; by the time they are of age they are earning more than their fathers can claim as the result of twenty, thirty or forty years of very skilled labour. How shall these boys be kept on the farm? Perhaps the difficulty will right itself when farm work becomes still more a matter of mechanical engineering than it is to-day; the tendency is all in that direction.

Since we left this pleasant neighbourhood and made our way northwards, a farmer I know, employer of the worker whose wife told me he was so worried, has been forced to file his petition; his case serves to exemplify the worst side of farming. This man inherited the land from his father, a slow, steady, honest representative of the old school, whose word was his bond; the son inherited his qualities and his disposition. He farmed traditionally; he was quite unaware that the times were changing, save in so far as life suddenly became more difficult. Everything he had to pay for, from labour down to binder-twine, was far more costly than it had ever been, while the things he had to sell had not gone up in anything like the same proportion. I am quite sure that he never paused to ask himself if there were no new methods applicable to the old acres; he had his own groove, in which at first he ran, then walked, and finally stumbled. A good, hard-working, honest man, content to labour strenuously and live frugally, he is probably suffering more than his creditors, because a long and honourable tradition has been broken.

There are hundreds of men in his plight all over England. They cannot adapt their farming practice to the needs of

INTERLUDE: EMPIRE DAY

the time, they do not know how. They have no resource save to oppose time-worn methods to new conditions and, slowly but surely, to be driven out. So far as I know them, they are inarticulate; they do not complain overmuch. They are utterly astonished to find that farming is no longer a matter of following a certain crop rotation and then, subject to chances of the weather, getting something in the stackyard that will enable them to live and carry on. They never asked for much from life, but they reckoned that the little it had to offer them was at least safe.

THAXTED, *May*.



CHAPTER II

THE FARMER'S WAY OUT

FARMERS are not happy in Essex just now. Some are very unhappy indeed, but among leading men, who take long views, there is a definite measure of confidence with regard to the future. Corn production is a source of loss and trouble, though some of the heavy lands in this county produce the finest wheat in England. It is not generally known, but it is none the less true, that in good years, on certain of the marshland farms round Southminster, in the Dengie Hundred, a crop of eight quarters, or even more, to the acre is not uncommon, but elsewhere the cost of production on heavy lands is very high, and current market-prices hardly meet it. There would be plenty of money in farming if the corn-growing could be omitted. One man, who has made a loss of £4000 a year in growing corn over a considerable area, has made profits of £1000 a year on poultry and £1000 a year on pigs, and said frankly that if he could have rested content with these and side-lines, and left the rest of his land alone, he would have had nothing to grumble about. Since he told me of his results, the price of pigs has fallen heavily.

Even those who take a very serious view of the position agree that it cannot last. Mr William Hasler, one of the most experienced agriculturists in Essex, a progressive man, who is associated with the big-business side of agriculture, put the case in a nutshell. "Our home-grown wheat," he said, "amounts at present to five million quarters. Of this about a million quarters are being taken for poultry, and a million for biscuit-making, and half-a-million for seed. This leaves us with just two and a half million quarters available for bread. To-day we have a drought in the Southern Hemisphere. There has been excessive rainfall in the Canadian West. It is quite possible that wheat this autumn will reach a high figure, and, so soon as England has no supplies sufficient to affect the

market, the producer overseas will be able to raise his price. We had an experience of that in the War, when the Government had to pay £7 a quarter for imported wheat, while the English grower had a price fixed, a price that never reached £5. Our necessities will prove, once again, the opportunity of other people.

"It is fairly clear," he went on, "that nobody will, or can, continue to produce food at a loss, and, as production diminishes, prices will increase, until at last the real necessity of home production on a large scale is understood by one and all. Then we shall begin all over again. The real value of publicity is that it calls attention to the coming crisis before it can develop. If remedies are applied in time, an enormous number of hard-working people, who must otherwise go under before the tide turns, will be saved."

Mr Hasler has put up to the National Farmers Union, with the consent of the Essex Branch, suggestions for certain very drastic changes. The first proposal is that agriculture shall be brought under the Safeguarding of Industries Act. Failing this, there is a series of proposals that would be helpful without being so far-reaching. They are:

1. A duty on imported malting barley.
2. A duty on imported flour, or, alternatively, prohibition of imports.
3. An export duty upon milling offals. (It is common knowledge that the trade sends milling offals out of the country at a low price, in order to reduce any surplus, and maintain a high price as against the English farmer.)
4. The staining of imported red clover.
5. Prohibition of the importation of skimmed condensed milk.
6. Assistance for the bacon-curing industry (hardly necessary in January, 1928).
7. The delivery of all foreign meat to consumers in packages stating the country of its origin.

So far as prohibition of imports is concerned, Mr Hasler

supports his view by pointing out that, although fresh pork and veal are no longer admitted to this country, the price of both, after a temporary rise, has gone to normal. In another direction he quotes the tax on foreign motor-cars as having helped the British industry without forcing up the price to the purchaser. He thinks that, if the importation of flour were prohibited, and there were even a moderate tax on imported wheat, the burden upon the consumer's table could be lightened by remission of taxes in other directions—for example, on tea.

"I have no fear of the future," he declared, "but I am worried about the period of transition. There are thousands of farmers who are carrying on under conditions of anxiety that ought not to exist, because their work is really of national importance, and I think that the Conservative Party ought to realize the very grave danger they run of driving the agricultural interest into the arms of their political opponents. On all sides I hear farmers saying that, if the Unionists have nothing more helpful than smooth words and trifling enactments, which do nothing to touch the root of the economic trouble, they will have to come to terms with another party. I do not think this is an idle threat. A few years ago such an alternative would not have been considered for a moment."

A journey through one hundred miles of Essex country has done little to reveal the undoubted seriousness of the position. Certainly there is much bare fallow, but that is due, in part, at least, to the prolonged drought. Corn looks good, beans are stunted, and so, too, are the greater part of the field peas. But, taken all together, the land looks in good heart and the stock in good condition, and it is impossible not to feel that the situation is well within the grasp of practical realists who are prepared to regard agriculture as a national rather than a political problem. I think agriculturists are so troubled just now that they would follow an authoritative lead.

COLCHESTER, *May*.

CHAPTER III

THE NOTE OF REVOLT

ONE of the most curious discoveries in the first hundred miles or so of this pleasant venture into the unknown was, that the changing mood of the farmers is introducing a new factor into political life ; many are becoming acutely conscious of their own resources. There is a village, not far from a meeting place of Essex and Suffolk, where, long years ago, I remember seeing the squire and parson standing together by the door of the schoolhouse on General Election day, and cross-examining the labourers as they came up. While one gentleman prophesied loss of employment if the vote were given to the Liberal, the other gentleman spoke gloomily about the hell fires that awaited those who betrayed their country. In those days there was no Labour Party, so the possibilities of betrayal were limited. I do not know how the dual admonition was received, but certainly the Tory was returned by a large majority. The squire has passed, and his successor remarked quite seriously in the course of conversation that in his opinion agriculturists would do well to consider what other parties had to offer to them, since it was quite clear that their own party has no adequate assistance to give.

This statement became the more significant when I remembered that, two days earlier, one of the cleverest farmers in the county—a man who is closely in touch with agricultural opinion—had said that many of the men he met in market and elsewhere had told him they thought it was time to find out whether other political parties would formulate a programme that would make farming worth while. I reminded them of Mr Baldwin's statement, so often repeated by his colleagues, that the country will not permit agriculture to be subsidized, and will not consider Protection ; but both declared that there must be other means of saving the situation, and that it is

the Government's business to explore all the avenues and to put forward a constructive policy. They complain that the Government has treated the opposition to protection or subsidy as complete justification for leaving agriculture severely alone, save in regard to small and insignificant concessions. The more intelligent farmers—those who read papers and study reports and keep in touch with the efforts that are being made to effect improvements—have not forgotten the Linlithgow Reports, and they remember, too, how the Government has shelved them; this is a deep grievance among the *intelligentsia*.

I find among the farmers, whether on the heavy lands of Essex or the light lands of East Anglia, the firm conviction that the middleman has feathered, and is still feathering, his nest at their expense; that they are not receiving a fair proportion of the price the consumer pays; and that, if the Government is barred from giving any other form of practical assistance, it should at least be able to deal with the trusts, combines and other bodies that work to render the farmer's efforts of no avail. It is in vain one points out that governments—like Heaven—help those who help themselves, and that co-operative endeavour by those concerned with production must precede official action, and may even render it unnecessary.

Since I spoke with the East Anglian group of farmers I have discussed the situation with many others, and believe that there are thousands in England to-day who believe that the Government is morally bound to give them assistance on lines of their own choosing. They object to the nation's fiscal system, they demand guarantees, and when faced by actualities of the situation take refuge in indignation and a declaration that they will cease to support the Party.

This attitude—which is singularly short-sighted, in view of the fact that neither the Liberal nor the Labour party has any proposal that involves protection on any scale, however limited—has been strengthened by the rather ill-advised insistence in certain quarters on the worst

features of the farmer's situation, and by the attitude of the National Farmers Union, which has seldom, I think, served the real interests of agriculture. It is late in the day to clamour for privilege, because the times we live in favour no overt grant of privilege to any class of society, and we have always to remember that the farmer is not popular in the towns. He has complained too often, and sometimes without due cause, and when he makes demands that would, in the opinion of the townsfolk, increase the price of their food, he creates nothing better than resentment. Townsmen remember that his contribution to the income tax is hardly worth mentioning. When he makes a determined and united effort, when he joins those who work with him in an earnest endeavour to improve his position by political means that are conceived with vision and executed with intelligence, he will command the respect of the townsfolk. Farmers in the Dominion of Canada, many of them English-born, have solved their worst problems by the aid of a Farmers Party at Ottawa and a Wheat Pool at Winnipeg. In the meantime, of course, the English agriculturist is being victimized by those who handle his produce; it may well be that he needs assistance to free his produce from thieves and profiteers.

Let me give a single instance of the workings of the trade. Milling offals are extremely high priced, middlings, for example, being between £7, 5s. and £7, 10s. a ton in May, 1927. Quite recently a group of millers sold 12,000 tons of middlings for export at £5 a ton, facing the loss on this deal in order to keep up prices at home and prevent any surplus from reducing them. That fertilizers, machinery and other essentials of his business are controlled by trade arrangements, the farmer is quite convinced, while he knows full well that when he sends cattle into the market they are bought by one of a group of dealers for subsequent resale. It is easy for those who do not know anything about the business to say that if the farmer cannot get the price he wants for his beast he can take it home again, but such are the conditions under

which our markets are conducted in this country, that animals take a full fortnight to recover from the fright and strain of the journey and the exposure. In farming parlance they "stand still" for that period. Here again, if the farmer had due consideration for his stock, he could save the standstill period by improving the conditions that prevail in most places where animals are bought and sold. One tries in vain to make those who offend realize that the cruelty they watch without protest week after week reacts upon their pockets.

A little while ago there was a great "boom" in milk, and a very considerable increase in the milking herds resulted, but to-day many farmers find that their milk business is not paying. I heard quite lately of one very able farmer, whose methods are the best, whose herds are faultless, whose equipment is second to none, and whose losses last year were between £2000 and £3000. The truth is that two huge combines and some smaller ones control the trade, and their dividends go to prove that the control is at once effective and popular. It is a commonplace that if the Home Counties farmer sends his vegetables up to London he will get little or nothing for them. He may even be called upon to pay, because the price he is alleged to have received is not sufficient to meet the various charges. I heard of a case the other day where a man sent many thousands of cabbages to London and received in return a bill for a few shillings, this being what he owed the consignee, according to the statement sent to him. But the housewife who bought those cabbages would have been charged a price that makes green vegetables a luxury.

For all these things the farmer is beginning to hold the Government responsible; he is coming to the very definite conclusion that a Government unable to control the men who are working his ruin is not worthy of his support, and he is quite prepared to transfer his allegiance to those who will give him a fair deal and a chance to re-establish himself. It is a curious fact that men who, only a few years

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ago, would not mention the name of any political body save their own, are now coming to the conclusion that it has failed them. The attitude of the farmers in this connexion will hardly bear analysis, but it must needs be placed on record.

IPSWICH, *May*.



INTERLUDE

THE PRICE OF THE "WEEK-END" COTTAGE

THEY will tell you in the village that Robert Guiver, known as "Bob," and Jane Day, known as "Jinny," his schoolmate and lifelong friend, who is soon to be his wife, are going up to London. He has found a job with a carman and contractor in the neighbourhood of the London Docks, and the two will start married life in one room at the top of a house, in an indescribably crowded and noisy district. There is nothing uncommon about this departure. Old folk recall nearly a score of cases within their own recollection in which sturdy young men and healthy vigorous girls have been driven out of the village and away from the land, not because they wanted to go, but because they wished to marry.

Until a young couple are churched, housing accommodation presents no great problem, because if two, three or even four people of the same sex share a bedroom nobody complains. Work on the land makes for fatigue; the night soon passes, and the fresh air of the open atones for the stuffiness of rooms in which the small window, even if it be made to open, admits a very minimum of fresh air. But when marriage comes, young folk—being naturally optimistic—look about in the first place for a cottage; when they find that this is not to be had their demands shrink, and they are prepared to consider sharing a cottage with another family or married couple. When this, too, is found impossible, they search for a couple of rooms, and failing to find these, the man is forced to hunt for a job elsewhere.

The Rural District Councils have power to build cottages, but take very good care not to exercise their prerogative. The fear of the smallest increase in the rates weighs heavily upon the councillors, and as many of them will neglect their obvious duty in dealing with such primitive matters as village sanitation and water supply, it is hardly to

be expected that they will reconcile themselves to outlay on cottages, particularly when they realize that the agricultural labourer cannot pay an economic rent. I have suggested to some of them that to build apartment-houses, in which they could let off a minimum of three rooms to a family, might be a way out; but this is a new idea, and consequently cannot be considered seriously. This is curious, remembering that many town houses are turned into flats and nobody complains. The cost of a large apartment-house in the country to take a score of families would probably be much less than the cost of twenty cottages.

As I have said, the young man and the still younger girl are going from the beauty of the countryside to the ugliness of the slums, and they are going because there is no room for them in the village of their birth and upbringing. But we may pass within a mile of their respective homes at least half-a-dozen charming cottages, dating from the spacious days of great Elizabeth or from the less spacious days of her immediate successors, all in the occupation of folk from town. Some of the newcomers are *bona-fide* dwellers in the countryside; they have deliberately associated themselves with the life of the village, and, undeterred by very poor response to their efforts, are doing what they can to make the country life better worth living.

But there are two or three cottages that have been surrendered to what we call "week-enders," folk who have acquired the property cheaply, or taken a long lease at a low rent, have spent money in modernizing the place, bought a little outlying land to add to the garden, set up a garage, installed wireless and telephone, and made a charming summer home. You will find them arriving on Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons from April on, leaving again on Sunday night or Monday morning, spending a long summer holiday there and retiring as soon as the weather becomes unfavourable. Winter knows them not, but there is generally a small job for somebody in the

village to light occasional fires, and to open the windows when the sun is shining.

Thirty years ago all these cottages belonged to the agricultural labourers, who paid from fifteenpence to two shillings a week rent; to-day, where they are rented, they fetch from £20 to £30 a year. Yet they are as much the property of the village folk as the old common lands that have been enclosed. They helped to keep the housing problem in solution, and to maintain upon the land the type of man and woman that the country needs. Because they have been divorced from their proper ownership the young men and women of the village must emigrate or seek the slums. The two who have decided upon the latter course are merely insignificant, if pathetic, figures in a long procession that may be watched by the discerning through the length and breadth of England.



CHAPTER IV

THE OUTLOOK IN SUFFOLK

EAST SUFFOLK, which I have just left behind, has its own agricultural organizer and its own special set of difficulties. Here, as elsewhere, the farmers are up against trouble, but down to the present the condition, on close examination, does not appear to be altogether disheartening. There have been considerable losses on arable cultivations, but there are just a few crops that have put the clever agriculturist on good terms with fortune. As one of the best authorities in the county remarked to me, farming to-day demands sufficient capital, sound judgment, hard work and good luck. Above all, a man must think out his problems for himself and abide the issues that he sets out deliberately to encounter. In this fashion he may save himself—and there is no other road to this particular aspect of salvation.

Sugar-beet is the great stand-by in East Suffolk. I was told of one farmer whose holding of 150 acres, nearly all arable, is devoted to nothing else. There are men with as many as 500 acres down to beet. Most land that is really suitable, and a good bit on which only an optimist can hope to win an adequate return, is being taken up, and it is probable that more than 20,000 acres are devoted to this crop. The farmers in East Suffolk are frankly realists, hard experience has robbed them of illusions. They know that while the subsidy lasts they can do very well—or at least reasonably—if only the weather will help them (the spring drought broke shortly after my visit and subsequently rains have helped).¹ But they have quite decided that when the subsidy goes off they will scrap beet production unless they see a definite prospect of profit. They have no intention of allowing the factory owners to treat them as the Combines treat the milk producer. At

¹ Since writing, a wet summer and a ruined harvest have worked havoc, here as elsewhere.

present the yield in these parts scarcely averages eight tons to the acre, and to put the industry on a sure footing, the average should be at least ten, or even twelve. Every effort is being made to improve cultivation, and it may be that the necessary results will be achieved, but if they are not, or if the factory owners try to get something for nothing, or make farmers work for them alone, then we may be sure that sugar-beet will disappear from the face of Suffolk as rapidly as it has sprung up there. The farmers of this part of the county are resourceful men, as everyone can see who studies the sequence of their arable sheep-farming, and the ability with which they grow suitable crops for every changing season; it is refreshing to see the skill with which they crop their holdings. It may be that they will persuade beet to survive the subsidy and so improve their lighter land.

On the heavy clay, wheat is the staple crop, and farmers are complaining, not so much about the price, which is not really bad, but about the uncertainty. One very experienced agriculturist said to me: "On the right fields I can grow wheat profitably at 55s. a quarter because I reckon to get five, or even five and a half, quarters to the acre in a really good year, and another £5 for my straw. Even with four quarters I don't lose money, even if I don't make any, at 55s. The trouble I am up against is that I have no guarantee that the price will be 55s. It may be 60s., which would be very satisfactory, or 50s., which would leave me little or no profit, or 45s. or even 40s., in which case there would be considerable loss. If only we could get our prices stabilized we should know where we are. It is the uncertainty that turns men's hair grey before the proper time. The weather gives us all the uncertainty we need. If the State can fix sugar-beet prices why can't it stabilize wheat?" That there are proposals for stabilization is common knowledge, but they have yet to be put to the test of actual experience. If our farmers had the co-operative sense they might pool their corn as their Canadian cousins have done, but this calls

for just that united action from which our agriculturists as a class are averse. Even this farmer, who feels that stabilization will save him, cannot say how it is to be brought about.

Suffolk is famous for barley, and on the lighter lands it is a popular crop, but the farmers are very unhappy because of the amount of foreign malting barley that comes into the country. Only their very best samples can find purchasers among the brewers, and what the brewers won't buy must be ground for pigs. This, they say, results either in no profit or in loss. They are agitating for a tax on the imported variety; they say it would not hurt the brewers and would help farming.

There is an immense demand for pigs in this county, and it has been greatly stimulated by the embargo on pork. I heard of one lady, who runs a pig farm and keeps a thousand pigs, feeding them with balanced rations and conducting her farm on the most up-to-date lines, to her own consequent profit. In all probability, if she were running a factory or a newspaper or a Government Department she would be equally successful. It is not the really clever, resourceful folk who cannot make money on the land.

The large black is a popular pig in this county, and farmers claim to get satisfactory farrows. It is interesting to note that while the industry is helped so greatly by the embargo the pork butchers are feeling very severely the loss of the cheap imported pork, and the cry of the bacon factories is loud and bitter because they cannot compete with the pork butcher, and their business languishes. Some of the balance-sheets of the factories provide dismal reading for the shareholders.¹

Suffolk's light land problem remains. There is a great deal of soil that is of quite a sandy nature, and various

¹ Since this section was written the price of pork has fallen to something in the neighbourhood of 6d. per lb. The public is no better off. Ham from pigs costing 6d. per lb. on the hoof is being sold, cooked, at 4s. 6d. per lb.

experiments have been tried to turn it to good account. Because it increases the humus, sugar-beet is the best light-soil crop; unfortunately, if the soil be too light the beet will not grow. Afforestation has been faced this year by a serious menace over considerable areas, the pine-saw fly having attacked the conifers, and there is no effective means in vogue at present of dealing with this trouble on large lines. The experiments in tobacco-growing on the light lands, much discussed a few years ago and regarded as quite promising, may be said to have come to an end rather than to have failed. Critics complained at the time that the tobacco had every quality but flavour, and there were some who, from the start, prophesied evil. That they have been partly justified is a matter of regret, for there is a ready market for the straw-coloured, flavourless English leaf. As one expert remarked quite frankly: "I hear of several men who, working on a small scale, have made a considerable profit per acre out of Suffolk-grown tobacco. It is used to give a bright colour to cheap varieties."

Much has been done in the cultivation of rye, and large crops have been gathered, but, unfortunately, the Englishman will not eat rye bread until it has been prepared in a foreign country and sent over to him at a price out of all proportion to the cost of the grain. Farmers cannot get a penny a pound for rye, but a certain rye biscuit that finds a place on my table costs eighteenpence a pound. It is made abroad, perhaps with English rye, for most of ours is exported. We have in this country a really remarkable capacity for being exploited. I can remember how, a few years before the War, the baby eels (elvers) of the Severn Estuary were being bought by the million for Germany. There they were fattened, and a great part of them came back fat to the English market, where they were purchased eagerly.

One encouraging feature about agriculture in Suffolk is the fidelity of the land worker to the land. He is hard worked, and the struggle to make ends meet, if he should

have a young family, is indeed deplorable. I hear of honest workers who must needs invoke parish relief, but the Suffolk man remains constant to the soil. There are very few factories in the county to call him from the fields, and he is bringing up his children to follow in his footsteps. "I saw a lad of eighteen," said a farmer to me, "draw a perfectly straight furrow across a field several hundred yards long, the other day. It was one of the most encouraging sights I have seen this year, because it does tell us that when agriculture is taken seriously in hand by this Government, or one of its successors, we shall have the men we need to do the work. You can't say as much in the Midlands or the Home Counties, where the lads, instead of handling the plough, are running away from it."

A glance at the map explains the situation. If you are born in Suffolk, and you do not wish to work on the land, there is small choice. I think that the starling that Laurence Sterne encountered on his *Sentimental Journey* must have been a Suffolk bird, all external evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. In the Midlands there are the factories, whose managers are always on the look-out for young hefty lads who are not afraid of a day's work, and whatever may be said against the life on the land, it tends to make lads enduring and capable.

I remember talking to one who had worked for me until the call came in 1914. "My mates made a lot of trouble about the working and the walking," he said, "but I didn't find that the one or the other troubled me. The food they gave us made the job seem easy. But of course," he added reflectively, "most of them came out of shops and factories. I expect they were more accustomed to meat than I was, and not quite so used to a hard job. I never minded being out there, I kept well all the time, and I fared better than I do at home."

BURY ST EDMUNDS, *May*.



INTERLUDE

A STORY OF THRIFT

THE village carpenter follows his craft no longer ; time has robbed him of the free use of his limbs. His son and grandson serve the village needs, and the old man may take life easy nowadays, spending all the fine days in porch or garden or little main street, his memory ever in the past, where he lives with the shadows who were once his friends and fellow-workers. The son had been carrying out repairs to a small cottage in the Endway, and his father, an interested onlooker, called my attention to the old oak beams.

"The man who lived there," he said slowly, "was my best mate. He left a fortune, he did—at least," he added, with a chuckle, "that's what he thought it was, and if you knew how it was earned, you'd agree with him."

Seeing that I was interested, he went on. The sun was flooding the street, cattle were grazing in the deep water-meadows beyond, a cuckoo was calling, and the peace of early summer evening brooded over the land. The old white-bearded man seemed to have come out of times remote to tell his story, and the setting to have been devised for him.

"Michael was his name," he began ; "born and bred here, started work when he was seven, and married when he was twenty-one. He earned 9s. a week most of his life, and came to have a family of twelve.

"That's rough on a man," he went on slowly, "I only had three myself, and I always found them enough, though I had a trade ; but Michael was fond of children. 'The more the merrier,' he'd say, when his wife was laid aside, but he found it a hard job to feed them, let alone the boots. The farmer he worked for didn't mind Michael having a few turnips or carrots or a handful of barley meal, there's many the day he never had nothing else for himself, but you can't bring up children like that, and Michael got

deep into debt in the village shop. We had but one then—we've three now, and carts and those motor things coming in. I wonder how they manage it, but there, what was I saying? Old Saul Armitage kept the shop, and he liked Michael and gave him credit all the years the family was coming and growing up, but one day he sent for him and said to him: 'I can't go on. You owe me £40. I never counted it up till last night, and I haven't hardly had a mite o' sleep.' Then Michael up and said to him: 'Mr Armitage,' he said, 'I've got you on my mind day and night, but you know I'm honest, and you know I'll pay. I don't drink and I don't smoke, and the children are growing up, and they will soon be able to earn a little and that will help me, and I don't owe another man a penny-piece. You've done so much, help me through to the end, for there's no one else can or will, and I swear you shan't regret it.'

"The rum part of it is," continued the old carpenter, after a pause, "that Saul Armitage, who was as hard a man as we ever had in the village, didn't turn nasty. He took his time to think about it, and then he said: 'I'll trust you, Michael, but don't have a pennyworth of anything you can do without.' So it went on. When the first boy went out to work Michael was able to pay for what he bought as he bought it, and as the others went out so he saved a bit of money, and one day he went up to the shop with £5 off the old debt. Once or twice a year he went up like that until at last the time came when he took the last £5, and he said: 'Mr Armitage, I've kept my word.'

"Then came the wonder bit. The old man had never parted with a penny in his life, far as folk knew, but he up and said to Michael: 'I knew you for an honest man. I won't take this last £5. Keep it for yourself.' And Michael said to him: 'This is the first piece of money that has ever belonged to me since I started at a penny a day, and I'm in me forty.'

"So he went away and bought two eight-week pigs, and fattened them, and a hen with a settin' of eggs, and a skep

of bees. He was only getting nine shillings a week then, and some of his children started at no more than he did, but they were all good workers, and the girls went into service, and sent home something of their earnings. I've seen a side of their own bacon hanging in the kitchen." The carpenter paused as though the effort had exhausted him. I waited, feeling there was something more to come.

"A man can't live as Michael did," he went on at last, "leastaways, not if he wants to make old bones. He got good food too late, and broke up soon after he was fifty. Just about the time he was fifty-five he died, and I put up the cross that's over him, and never had a penny-piece for it and didn't want it, and that's the truth. Last time I saw him Michael said: 'I'm going home now, but I've left a tidy fortune. The wife shouldn't want with what I leave her and the children to help.'"

"What was the fortune?" I inquired, realizing that the story was over.

"Forty-five pounds," said the carpenter, "and a lot of money too, when you come to save it sixpence at a time, and don't start till you're forty and more. But it didn't really matter to her, for she followed him within the year."

STOWMARKET, *May*.



CHAPTER V

NORFOLK V. ADVERSITY

NORFOLK is a singularly detached county, following its own methods, pursuing certain practices that have not much more than age to recommend them to-day, making a determined struggle to maintain land in cultivation, and tackling the problems that the last few years have brought in their train with a certain stubborn tenacity of purpose that evokes admiration. The county, so far as its less progressive agriculturists are concerned, has much to learn; it has specialized for many years in stock-breeding, and has produced the largest beasts, the heaviest sheep and the weightiest pigs in England. Big, rough, Irish store cattle have been brought to Norfolk to tread the straw and provide the manure for the heavy corn-lands. The most popular sheep have been the cross between the Cotswold and Suffolk; 90 per cent. of the pigs derive from the large white boar and the large black sow, a union that yields a white pig with a little blue and black about it.

To-day all this meat may be said to be in disrepute. The Irish stores tend to improve in weight after a period of standstill due, apparently, to very rough treatment in transit, but they do not improve in quality, and are as coarse after the feeding period as they were when they first entered East Anglia. I have been told by fatteners that a certain proportion develop liver trouble, and do not thrive. The Norfolk sheep produces the big joints that the housewife will not look at, and there are many who prefer the small joints of pork. So, in these times of keen competition and great stress, the Norfolk farmer has to revise his methods or face an unresponsive market, and in order to adopt the former practice he has to train his stockmen, who are accustomed to fattening big stores, and teach them to rear small beef from calves. His problem is so to breed, rear and feed as to bring a steer to market

in condition at twenty months or, if possible, even less. In that way he may still make money, but his present methods will not help him.

The four-course rotation in Norfolk is wheat, roots, barley and one-year grass, and it is very hard to get that system reconsidered by the rank and file of men who follow the rule of thumb. It has always been said that Norfolk will never be anything but a corn-growing county, and if only corn prices were not subject to violent fluctuations, for the benefit of the middlemen, this might still hold true; but, because of the uncertainty that is felt all over East Anglia, many farmers in the eastern part of the county are putting very good wheat-land down to fruit. They have a certain justification, indeed it is said with confidence that the black currants of East Norfolk are the best in England, and that they have even forced the Kentish crops to take second place. There is of course more money in currants than in wheat, but those who care most for the future of the country are grieved to see an essential product sacrificed to luxury crops.

With barley, which is a very big interest in Norfolk, there is a great deal of trouble. The brewers will buy only certain types, which must be very good of their kind. They are not constant in their practice; Norfolk farmers tell you that they do not know their own minds, and quote such things as a variation of 6s. a quarter in the price of the same sample offered in the same afternoon by two sellers to one buyer, who bought contentedly at the higher figure. Medium and low-grade barleys are in poor demand; they are used, as in East Suffolk, for pig-fattening. The experts of the county are making a strenuous effort to improve the barley crops, and they have found that they will benefit to some extent on the lighter soils by autumn sowing, but this improvement affects only the yield and not the quality, and at present the question of quality gives trouble. The trade shows a great disposition to demand new experiments from farmers, and to fill itself up with foreign barley while these experiments are being

carried out. This does not make for harmony between growers and maltsters.

Where milk is concerned Norfolk is an exporting county, but the farmers are not making a profit over milk production. The average price paid in Norfolk by the Combine from the beginning of April to the end of June is apparently 11d. per gallon, and, as one farmer said to the writer, the only thing you can say about this is that you lose less money on milk than you do on fattening rough stores. In other parts of England I was to find that the Combines have cut even this low price to a far lower one.

Sugar-beet is the bright spot in farmland; about 25 per cent. of this country's crop is grown in Norfolk. Growers are confident that they will improve the yield per acre, and there is no doubt that the beet is doing good to light lands, because it is increasing the humus; the factor that encourages the farmer in Norfolk is the fixed price. He knows what his minimum is, and that he can improve it by getting more beet to the acre, and a bigger sugar content to the beet, so he works with the certainty of a reward for his labours.¹

Here, as in Suffolk, the farmer is asking the same question. Since it has been shown that stabilization encourages production, gives security, and stimulates the farmer to do the best that is in him, why cannot the Government devise means of fixing the price of wheat and barley, and not subjecting them to the fluctuations due to imports? They are not asking for a high price, but for a fixed one, and they are sure that if the State could give them this measure of security they would be able to keep their arable land in sound order, and maintain a good head of workers. The farmer's belief is that nothing is really impossible to a Government. He is convinced that Whitehall has but to say to the wheat "be stabilized" and that, once the order is given, further fluctuations will be quite impossible.

¹ The wet sunless summer has reduced the yield and quality of the beet crops; the factories have reduced the price; the outlook has worsened.

At present the tendency is to shrink from corn production. Fruit-growing provides one example, but there are many others. In the fen-lands, on the borders of the Isle of Ely, flowers are grown, there is an immense increase in poultry production, and a certain amount of land is down to grass for that purpose. The favourite breeds are Rhode Island Reds and Leghorns, and the bulk of the trade is in eggs. Some co-operation is to be found in this branch of farming, to the great advantage of all concerned. Here, as in Suffolk, many men are going into business and combining farming with some other occupation; but, taking them all together, Norfolk rears thoroughly keen farmers; they are up against an extremely difficult proposition, and are trying to adapt their means to the necessary end. There is much derelict land in the county, but here the possibilities of sugar-beet are being carefully weighed. In short, the Norfolk farmer is prepared to consider anything, except the question of owning himself beaten by conditions which, though they press as hardly upon him as upon any set of men in England, are being met with a fine courage and a determination to win through. I have found nothing more stimulating on the journey than the dozen days spent in Norfolk among those who are making the best of a bad job, and fighting every inch of the way. What is needed for their assistance is a national policy that considers with an equal eye the needs of the townsman and of the countryman, and endeavours to do justice to both.

I spent a morning on a typical fruit farm, near the coast, in North Norfolk. Here are some 150 acres, closely cultivated, on medium soil. The farm was established before the War in a small experimental fashion, a few acres being put down to half standard apple-trees with apple-bushes as "fillers" between. These "fillers" have cropped well and have not yet been removed. Later it became apparent that small bush fruit offered a profitable field, and many acres were put down to black-currants,

gooseberries and strawberries; then, taking advantage of the abundant opportunity, the owner of the farm began to raise stock for the nurseryman. I think he had nearly 100,000 black-currant bushes to dispose of this year, and the chances are that he will have none left now.

Gradually the most modern methods of grading and packing have been adopted, and to-day fruit from this farm is sent to all the great markets, with the solitary but not surprising exception of Covent Garden. The effort of the grower is to dispatch his fruit so packed that the buyer may receive it with a very minimum of handling. In fact, there need be no actual handling from the time the fruit leaves the packing sheds to the time it is taken into the consumer's house. The old heavy crates and boxes that are returnable have been discarded, and advantage has been taken of the development in the manufacture of light strong boxes, and baskets made of chip or cardboard. It is cheaper to buy these, and not to ask for them back, than to purchase the heavier material and pay the return carriage. Naturally the profits vary with the season, but in the past seven years, which have been good, bad and indifferent, the capital value of the farm has doubled, and in a good season the profit amounts to something in the neighbourhood of 15 per cent. If every crop in a given year were a success the proceeds would of course be much larger, but an untimely frost can suffice in a few hours to render nugatory the work of an entire year. Some fields of currants suffered during the spring, and the loss of fruit is estimated at many tons. Flowers have been added to fruit-growing, to help the return at the dead end of winter. Daffodils are grown at a profit of about £12 per acre, and there is every intention of extending this branch of the enterprise.

From the economic standpoint the fruit farm has much to commend it. On 150 acres of arable land five men would constitute a big staff; here we find fourteen. The statutory wage in North Norfolk is just above 30s., while these men are paid 8½d. an hour for an average week of

fifty hours; there is overtime at 9d. per hour, and there are certain special jobs, so that a competent hard-working man can average 37s. 6d. per week, and when the weather is very wet he can find a job under cover.

The movement is towards an increase of acreage and employment. For the next year or two the owner proposes to add about thirty acres annually; after that he will lay down another farm to fruit, if conditions justify the experiment. At present there is no danger that the supply will overtake the demand; the worst that can happen is that prices may go lower, but, given a good season, it would be possible to face reduced prices with some approach to equanimity.

There is only one drawback to this development of fruit-farming in Norfolk, and it has been voiced quite frankly. The land on which the best fruit is raised would give first-class wheat, as much as five quarters to the acre in a good year. The country stands more in need of home-grown wheat than of gooseberries, strawberries or black-currants. But fruit-farming may be said to treble employment and produce a fair profit, while wheat-growing, even in a good year, does little more than pay its expenses. So the fruit is creeping on to the corn-lands, and grows thickly enough to hide the larger national issue from sight.

Farmers are quite outspoken. "If the Government can make it possible for us to give the country high farming at a profit," said one of them, "I'm quite ready to do my bit, and so is every man I know. But if, when I follow one line of production, I lose money, I must look for another. If the country will pay me better for what it does not need than for what it lacks, I must produce what is not needed. Farmers can't lose money to feed England any more than boot manufacturers can lose money to see England properly shod."

WROXHAM, NORFOLK, *June*.

INTERLUDE

THE GROWTH OF DAIRY FARMING

WHEN first I knew the village, many years ago, the leading dairy herd consisted of fifty or sixty Shorthorn cows, some of which might have been culled from Pharaoh's lean kine. If I remember rightly, there were five milkers, elderly men for the most part, who had been brought up to the practice of wet milking—that is to say, when their hands got too dry, the least offensive thing they did was to dip them in the milk pail. The cows were tied up, but there was neither feeding trough in front nor gutter behind. Cleanliness was not demanded of the workers: you could not expect it for 12s. a week. The churns were loaded on to milk-floats, and carted several miles to the station, and if the milking sheds were not as dirty as some, they were distinctly uninviting. In the dairy itself, where the cream was separated and the butter made, things were spotless, because the farmer's wife and daughters, who were in charge, had a taste for pure food, and were allowed to indulge it since "the Master" was a practical, hard-headed man who never quarrelled with cleanliness if dirt was not a better paying proposition. What happened to the milk when it reached London, who bought it and for how much, I do not know, but what remained behind for butter was set out in large shallow bowls and creamed by hand; the "skim" was sold at a penny per quart to the people in the village. It had a very definite food-value, and together with fat pork, at fourpence a pound, helped the labourers' children to thrive in spite of the poor earnings of the head of the house.

To-day the principal dairy herd numbers about two hundred, and the owner of the farm will travel as many miles to buy his cows. The milking sheds have been transformed, every cow has a number, and its milk-yield is on record; the place is spotless, the milkers wear overalls and white caps, the cows are milked by machinery. Rubber

tubes are fastened to the teats, and they work with a sucking action very similar to that with which the calf draws sustenance from its mother. Evidently the motion is pleasant, for the cows stand quietly munching, while the steady stream of milk passes through a glass tube into a closed can. The glass reveals the cessation of the flow, and when it is over the tubes are taken off, and a skilled milker with clean hands strips each cow in turn. The milk is then taken to the cooling-house, and passes over the cold tubes into a churn by way of a strainer. When the churn is full, it is closed down at once; save for the strippings, no hand has touched the cow from the time the tubes were put on. So soon as the last cow has been milked, hot water is passed through the milking apparatus, thoroughly cleaning it, and every day one or more sets are taken to pieces and hand-scoured so that no impurity can remain.

By the time the churns are ready, a great motor-lorry, from a town thirty miles away, is in the yards; it belongs to the distributing agents of that town, and carries the milk for a trifle over one penny per gallon. The railway charges were a fraction under a penny, but they involved a journey of several miles to the station twice a day, and the cost in time, petrol, wear and tear are more than the trifling addition payable to the present buyers.

In the old days the farmer grew many acres of roots, and in the great barns men were busy at all hours making up the food that was fed in a certain haphazard fashion to each cow, the ration being, generally speaking, a uniform one, and each cow being as good as her neighbour, because nobody took the trouble to see whether she was thrifty or not. To-day there is no mixing work, the mangold clamps have disappeared. The yield of every cow being recorded, each cow is judged by her yield. Summer grass is considered good enough for maintenance and milk ration of the two-gallon animal, the three-, four-, and five-gallon cows get, in addition, $3\frac{1}{2}$, 7 or $10\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of concentrated ration prepared by one of the firms that has studied the question

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and can give the precise measure of each food constituent required. For roughage and to assist digestion there is a ration of hay. Cows are tested periodically for tubercle, and reactors are removed at once. The importance of this is realized when we remember how close one cow stands to another, and how rapidly in the heated atmosphere of the milking shed trouble is likely to spread. One may say in passing that the tuberculous cow is a much more common factor in the average untested herd than it is supposed to be; some experts reckon that one cow in three is tuberculous, though the milk is not necessarily tainted.

Now the result of this modern feeding method is that the cow receives precisely what she has earned; for every gallon of milk that she yields there is an equivalent. The ration cakes cost, roughly, a trifle above 1d. per lb., so that for every gallon above two the farmer pays her something between $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 4d.

Yet another practice prevails. In the month before a cow calves she is stalled apart and fed richly, to the full extent of her receptive capacity. The calf benefits by this, and the first flush of milk is the heavier, while the cow is better able to endure the strain of calving. Records are examined at frequent intervals, and the cow that has ceased to be a paying proposition is drafted out of the herd and fattened for the butcher, dual-purpose stock being kept. The farmer has no liking for cows that yield an extraordinary volume of poor milk and finish up, to quote his own language, "fit for the knacker but not for the butcher."

Now it might be thought that the profit on this intensive milk production would be very great, but in truth it is not. In this particular instance the position is better than it would be if the milk were consigned to the Combine, but it is only by the installation of expensive milking machinery, and the consequent reduction of labour, that any dairy becomes a paying proposition. With the aid of milking machinery, three men can do the work of four,

and in a very big herd the saving in wages amounts to several hundreds a year.

In the meantime, the men to whom the production of clean milk is difficult if not impossible, partly from lack of means and from lack of inclination, are in a serious plight. "This Government," said one of them to the writer, "ought to be ashamed of itself. I have kept cows for fifty years, and my father before me, and my grandfather before him, and I never took no notice of all these new-fangled notions, and I brought up my children on the milk, and the village had it too, and nobody ever made a complaint. There is far too much interference with everybody nowadays. Why can't the Government mind its own business, and leave us to mind ours?"

These are the protests of those who have fallen behind the times and can never hope to catch them up. In a little while their place will know them no more; but the position of the man with the new methods and the heavy outlay on machinery and on suitable bulls is by no means easy. The rapid increase in the cow population of these islands is leading to over-production, and gives the big Combines such a power over the producer as will reduce him to the subsistence-level. Not only do they own the churns that the farmer uses, but they can afford to be very scrupulous with regard to butter-fat content and solids, though it is said that in some depots all milk is separated on arrival. Then sufficient cream is returned to meet legal demands, and the surplus is middleman's perquisite. The dairying question is very difficult to handle. On the one hand, we lack the means of turning surplus into cheese and by-products, and on the other hand, if we had the necessary machinery, it might well be that production at a profit would prove impossible, because we are always up against the hard fact that countries in which the standard of living is lower than ours can undercut us all the time. At present the comparatively modern milk-producing industry is just about paying its way, but while some men express themselves quite satisfied, others have already reached the

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stage at which profits tend to disappear. A bull that does not justify a pedigree, or a reputation, an outbreak of Foot and Mouth—there are many forms in which trouble comes to the farm. Naturally the farmer is urged to co-operate, but it may be doubted whether the whole dairying industry could provide brains to cope with those of the Combines. It may be that the solution will not be found until the State comes to the conclusion that the distribution of milk is as important to the welfare of the nation as the distribution of correspondence.

NORFOLK, *June*.



CHAPTER VI

AN EAST ANGLIAN SQUIRE

NOW and again, on the road through rural England, the traveller finds men who, if they cannot command success, contrive to deserve it. When one of the great storms of depression blow, and agricultural craft are sinking in all directions, theirs contrive to ride out the gale. When prosperity comes they are waiting to take advantage of it, generally by strengthening the foundation of their undertakings. They have a quick eye for a new process, they keep in touch with scientific development and research, they are men of single purpose, and the land holds them in the grip that is never relaxed.

Such a one I met lately in East Anglia, engaged in the administration of a considerable estate on lines that arrest attention. His tenants rent their farms on seven-year contracts, with a sliding scale based on the published cereal prices in the county markets during November. If cereals are dear, their rent goes up; when the market is bad, rent goes down. The result is that all the tenants share the help that the landlord gives when times are bad, and the farmer has no need to disguise his prosperity when times are good. On the upland farms the fencing and draining work is carried out by the landlord, who charges about two shillings an acre, and neither makes nor seeks to make a profit out of the job. Every drain on an estate of several thousand acres is mapped, so that trouble can be located without loss of time. Four men are in charge of the hedges, each takes his quarter of the estate and has a personal pride in its condition. There is a certain co-operation between farmers and landlord; one helps the other. Where they are all working on a certain crop—say, for example, sugar-beet or mustard—they will divide certain services in connexion with transport and river work.

Bricklayers and a carpenter have a permanent place on the staff, so that the buildings are kept in good condition;

there is nothing here of the neglect which paves the way to heavy bills for repairs. The landlord is a game-preserver and raises several thousand head of birds in some three hundred acres of well-tended timber. For this work he keeps about eight men in full employment, extra labour being taken on at certain seasons as necessity arises. There is a costing system that reaches even to the sporting side of the estate, and has discovered that pheasants are put over the gun at about 3s. 9d. a bird; the profits, and they are not inconsiderable, go to the maintenance of the series of woods which are run in strict accordance with modern methods of forestry. Sport is a business proposition here—it distributes a four-figure sum in wages. Farmers receive half the profit on the sale of hares, in return for relinquishing their rights under the Ground Game Act; the estate provides lads to keep pheasants from young crops.

The woods produce more than timber and game; for many years past their floors have been planted with bulbs. At the back end of winter and in early spring the flowers go off in vanloads to all the leading markets of Northern England, where they can compete best with imported blooms. In many parts the woods yield seeds for which there is a brisk world demand.

Along the river banks of all the clean-flowing streams are planted cricket-bat willows (*Salix alba*, Var. *Cerulea*), the best and most marketable type having been arrived at after long years of experiment and research. Rapidly maturing varieties of poplar are grown extensively for the chip baskets demanded by the Wisbech fruit trade, they hold their own in competition with the Polish aspen. The best kind seems likely to be a comparatively new one, *Populus robusta*. Larch is grown for pergola poles.

The Squire makes experiments and some of them succeed—others are not so fortunate—but every acre of ground is tested for the discovery of latent potentialities. By the aid of a bonus system his men participate in the fortunes of the estate. At the same time, the staff is regarded as a

unit, and the whole programme of the year is mapped out in detail, as part of a campaign.

Throughout May and June, for example, everybody, with the exception of carpenters and bricklayers, is busy chopping out and singling the sugar-beet crop, which here, as elsewhere, has saved the situation in East Anglia and, given sunshine as well as rain, may be the mainstay of many farmers for the next few years. So important is this work that haymaking does not start much before July, when naturally much of the quality of the grass has been lost. The cereal harvest may be said to tread on the heels of haysel, it closes down about mid-September, when all hands are engaged on raising the sugar-beet crop. This work ends with the year, and in January and February the staff turns to timber-felling and replanting in the woodlands.

The crop rotation is five-course: roots, barley, potatoes, beans, wheat. Of these, the roots are essentially a farm crop; barley is grown for the maltsters; potatoes, long the mainstay of Eastern Anglia, have suffered an eclipse, and prices have gone down to about £3 a ton, though they must cost round about £4; beans are consumed on the farm; wheat hovers in the balance between loss and profit. When the yield is five quarters to the acre there should be no loss if the price is round about 55s., but here, as elsewhere, probably much of the corn that is kept in stacks through the winter pays heavy tribute to vermin. It is fair to add that, for certain weeks in the year, the duty of the keepers consists in laying down poison baits throughout the estate, no hedge or run being neglected. But beyond the boundaries there are smallholdings, whose owners or tenants take no heed of vermin, and when they multiply, and send out their legions in all directions, the cleanest ground becomes liable to infection.

The estate is within easy reach of a sugar-beet factory, so that the cost of transport is quite moderate, but these factories tend to have a demoralizing influence, because they engage men for their brief season at high wages, on twelve-hour shifts. From the beginning of October to the

middle of January the seasonal work goes on. 'Then the staff, or a great part of it, goes out on to the "dole," and is probably without regular employment until the factory opens again.

The problems of estate management, ever varying, calling for swift decisions, and often for large outlays, become very grave in times of crisis. Broad views and general principles must be associated with infinite attention to detail, and it may be doubted whether anything save a long inherited tradition, and a feeling of responsibility to both forbears and descendants, would urge any man of marked business attainments to labour daily throughout the year for so modest an interest on capital. Difficulties on an estate like this are manifold; for part of the land runs into the Fens, and all the intricacies of an elaborate draining system must be mastered. An estate in this country must have its own system of carrying away surplus water, quite apart from the system or systems for which the land is rated, and the question of drainage, with which the Ministry of Agriculture is now endeavouring to grapple, is more than ordinarily complex. It may be doubted whether the fenlands are good enough to justify proposed expenditures: they sink about half-an-inch a year, and in many parts of them the humus is disappearing and in place of cultivable soil the farmer finds white sand.

Engineering, housing, repairing, draining, tree-planting, the development of fresh industries, the constant supervision of all acts of husbandry, occasional experiments which, though perfectly justified, and even necessary, may prove unprofitable in the end; these are parts of the price that the Squire pays for his lordship of manors, and his "right and left" in due season at high birds, a privilege shared with a syndicate. He has no illusions. "If farmers will not hire land at a low price under a good landlord," he will tell you, "I don't think any change in the political situation is going to abolish us, since we are forced to take what other men leave and farm it on our own account. But if nationalization comes, let us hope, for the sake of those

who have to pay for it, that the estate system of keeping a permanent staff for building, repair, drainage, water supply, vermin destruction, fencing and forestry will be maintained, and that the work will be controlled by a resident land agent or by the landowner himself, the only two people who have the necessary knowledge and are in touch with actualities. To put in men whose knowledge is purely theoretical is to invite a large expenditure and an endless series of expensive blunders. If there are those who can do better with the land, let them have their chance."

But in point of fact no estate can be administered by rule of thumb. Only those who have grown up on it, and have mastered its every detail, can hope to establish it as a paying proposition—or at least as near to a paying proposition as modern conditions permit.

NORTH NORFOLK, *June*.



INTERLUDE

DERELICT ACRES

“THIS is terribly depressing,” said my companion at the steering-wheel. “You might think that there had been a plague here. I have a horrid feeling that we shall see dead bodies on the banks or the highway.” I reassured her, but not very successfully, for on either side of the long road the land lay derelict, and the fine June day seemed to mock it. Here and there heath had been burned; flames had caught some of the conifers, whose gaunt, scorched branches stood up as though in mute protest against an act that had deprived them of their power to respond to the sunshine. Rabbits ran in and out of the bracken; cock-pheasants, their brief period of domesticity over, strutted about, as though conscious that they dwelt, for a while at least, in security; for the rest, there were pine-trees past numbering, and bracken and heather, and a long white ribbon of road that seemed to stretch endlessly through those waste-lands of Middle Norfolk. The area of desolation, that embraces Methwold and passes eastwards to Watton and descends by Tottington, Wretham and Croxton in the direction of Thetford, did not seem to belong rightly to England; it recalled to me in part the backlands of Ontario and the bare plains of Manitoba before settlers came. Certainly it appeared to have no place in an overcrowded island that must find £1,000,000 a day to pay for imported food, and if indeed there was room for such desolation surely it was not within some four hours’ run of the greatest city of the Empire. The only crop to be seen was weeds, and a multitude of these were seeding generously; houses there were none for miles, not even an alehouse; nor was there any traffic. It was a relief after passing through so vast a wilderness to see a horse grazing on some scrubby pasture, for the depression was in no way imaginary.

Happily, even waste must come to an end, and we came

presently to the village of Croxton, a little to the north of Thetford, and in a meadow beyond took our lunch in the open, as our custom is, when the weather permits. It was there that an old labouring man, knotted and gnarled by the harsh service of the land, passed on his homeward way and stayed awhile to tell us of things that have been. Let me translate him from the vernacular, and restrict his recital to the facts.

"I know they say it is bad land," he remarked scornfully, "but let them tell that to those who know no better. Strangers might believe them, nobody else will. I worked round Tottington and Wretham, boy and man, and I can tell you that all the country you have been through in that machine of yours grew crops and good ones. I can prove it. There is Mr ——, who lived over yonder, and kept threshing tackle. He used to send that tackle to two landowners just after harvest, one lived at Wretham and the other at Tottington. The old threshing machine was kept busy until the spring, just for that couple of landowners, big men, mind you, but it took all the winter to thresh what they could grow off this land that folk say is worthless, and there were nine or ten men on the machine all the time. To-day there is no threshing tackle that goes up that road, because there is nothing to thresh when it gets there, and there are no men living over there, because there wouldn't be a job if they did."

"Are they going to leave the land like that?" I inquired.

"No," said the old man; "they talk of making a forest of it. They are going to plant trees. I suppose," he added, with a touch of sarcasm, "folk who do such things have forgotten how to grow corn. All they get off that land at present is rabbits and pheasants, and before they can start their planting they will have to get those rabbits down, or trees won't be much use to them. So I suppose that will be a job of sorts for somebody. But if you had seen the threshing machine as I have seen it, and the wagons full of corn sacks . . ."

INTERLUDE: DERELICT ACRES

Apparently the memory displeased him, or he felt he had given enough of his time and knowledge to strangers, for he tramped slowly but sturdily down the road, talking to himself.

I recalled Julius Cæsar's description of these islands—"one horrible wood." Now, after nearly 2000 years, in the course of which the English land has been brought under cultivation so successfully that for centuries it supplied the needs of the entire population, we are permitting a vast acreage, that could produce food at need, to revert to the condition in which Julius Cæsar found it. Nobody complains save an old man who, in the evening of his days, sees the land that brought forth food abundantly divorced from its proper uses. He can only voice his sentiments to strangers, who are powerless to help. Certainly the time is ripe for an intelligent agricultural policy, for while there can be no valid objection to afforestation, of which the country stands in very real need, it is not in areas capable of arable cultivation that the work should be undertaken.

NORFOLK, *June*.



CHAPTER VII

SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND THE BORDER FENLANDS

THE first impression of Lincolnshire to a man who enters it from Norfolk is not happy. The unending flatness, the dyke-seamed meadows, the abundance of villas, the absence of woods and of quiet lanes, strikes a note of disappointment when the most beautiful county of East Anglia has been left behind. Yet, the first run from Downham Market by way of Holbeach and Spalding, on the Peterborough, Croyland and Wisbech road, was in the nature of a revelation. First it revealed the full extent of what man has done to win a vast tract of land from the sea, secondly, it showed how he has persevered to make it fruitful, until now it stands renowned throughout England for fertility of soil and generous measure of crops:

Studied carefully when the first desire for the superficial beauties had been overcome, it was impossible not to see, in all the developments that make for ugliness, signs of a great prosperity. Norfolk and Suffolk are rich in beauty, but you may travel for miles and see few signs of life. The Holland Division of Lincolnshire, through which we took our first tour of inspection, though utterly lacking in beauty, was full of life, activity and, I think, wealth. Orchards have been planted to the extreme limit of capacity, the bush fruit was being carefully cultivated, there was an abundance of labour, though the minimum wage is 35s. Such corn as we saw was very thick, the leys were heavy, while potatoes and beans were thriving, and it was hard to find any neglected land. Even the towns had little of the quiet aloofness of East Anglia; they looked as though business were perennially brisk. In the first run of one hundred miles there was no noticeably bad cultivation, there were no waste places, and on many of the fields, where hoeing was in progress, large groups were

at work. If the men who reclaimed the fens and took advantage of the fertile soil had been scared by the magnitude of their task, and had sat down with folded arms to say that ruin was staring them in the face, England would have lost some of her best land. It is the spirit that faced the problems of Lincolnshire which is rather obscured in England to-day, but it is in evidence for all those who will look closely enough.

When you leave the market-garden area for the fen-country you find that the system in vogue is very modern. Farmers are growing potatoes over large areas, mustard by contract, and a certain amount of free mustard for speculative purposes, a little wheat for straw, and on the Cambridge and Norfolk end, as much sugar-beet as they can crowd on to their land. This last is the one crop that promises a substantial profit from soil that is not exceptional, and encourages, even demands, good cultivation. At the same time some of the fenland farmers are faced with very serious problems; when the fen sinks on clay subsoil the land improves in value, but a part on the Cambridge-Norfolk side is on sand, and as the sand comes through the soil loses all fertility. The tendency to sink is responsible for the subsidence of buildings that have been erected on the fenlands, and compels agriculturists to build around them rather than on them.

The question of fen drainage is a very serious one. A Drainage Board disposes of a great part of the water, and various estate owners have their own waterways through which they clear their land. The great work carried out by one of the Dukes of Bedford at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the waterway known as the "Bedford Level," carries into the Ouse an immense volume from the uplands. The Ministry of Agriculture is endeavouring to promote a controversial measure to effect further drainage through the medium of a new Board, which is to spend £2,500,000 on clearing out the tidal river; but men who farm on or near the Ouse are inclined to believe that the capital value of

the land to be drained does not justify the expenditure. Nature's working arrangements between the Ouse and the Wash are not sufficiently known for any engineer to undertake to direct them with a fair chance of success. Objectors claim that poor land will be taxed out of cultivation to make rich land richer.

Sugar-beet farming may improve the value of some of the inferior fenlands, but farmers are at a great expense to make up for the potash deficiency, and must treat the land liberally with kainit or with muriate of potash in order to bring it into working condition. As the subsidy is a diminishing one, a considerable question is raised. It is likely that if the farmers of Norfolk and the borderlands were consulted they would much prefer to see money spent on the maintenance of a beet subsidy than on a new and costly system of drainage. But it does not follow that they are right.¹

SPALDING, *June*.

¹ The drainage scheme was dropped in October.



CHAPTER VIII

THE PROSPERITY OF THE FENLANDS

FOR purposes of agricultural administration, Lincolnshire is not one county but three: Holland lies to the east, Kesteven is on the west, Lindsey stands above both. In Holland county nobody talks seriously of depression, though potatoes, blighted last year, were frost-bitten both a few months and a few nights ago. The railway is not complimented on its good service, one might go still farther, if lacking in respect for this means of transport; the London markets, whether for milk or vegetables, give the grower minimum prices, and sometimes keep him waiting for his money. But it is hard to talk of bad times in a county where agricultural land fetches a three-figure sum per acre at auction, where newly broken grass in the fen-country can command a double-figure rent per acre, where land that has been under the plough these thirty years is hired at £6, and one hears of £10 per acre being offered for fields that will serve the bulb-grower. So rich is the soil in Holland, and in parts of Lindsey, that in mid-June you may see corn that has "lodged"—*i.e.* has fallen by reason of its own weight. But the farmers do not care to grow much corn. Contract or free mustard and potatoes are the popular crops, and in Holland there are farms where the potato-land yields fifteen tons to the acre, and men grow so rich that their wealth is common talk. Even the smallholder thrives, pays up to £5 per acre for his holding, and stands in a queue to get it. For a holding of thirty-two acres near Spalding, in June last, there were twenty-seven applicants, and of these twenty-five satisfied the County Authority that they were likely to make good, though the rent was 50s. per acre. London markets may deceive and railways may delay, blight may spoil the potatoes or rain damage the light-land barley beyond all hope of a good sale to the maltsters, but Holland prospers, and some of the farmers

who are heard to complain of seasonal mischances have three or four cars in their garage. I was told of a newspaper correspondent who came to Spalding market to hear complaints, and was directed to another part of Lincolnshire.

Kesteven has its good land, perhaps a third of its area can vie with Holland. Both the fen and the silt in these counties boast rich alluvial soil, and even Lindsey, perhaps the poorest of the three Lincolnshire counties by reason of its long stretch of Lincoln heath, gets a little piece on the north-west (the Isle of Axholme) and another in the south-east. But in this northern county, where the wolds predominate, an area with chalk subsoil, hard to farm profitably, the farmer looks to his sheep, his barley, and to general production; there are no specialities for him, though he is trying, rather late in the day, to grow sugar-beet, and a new factory is rising at Bardney. He manages to maintain a dairy herd, because Hull and Grimsby are near enough to take his milk and not sufficiently organized to keep him from making a profit on it; but since sheep have been a bad trade and corn an uncertain one he has been faced by hard times. Yet, as one who speaks with authority said in discussing the situation: "Throughout the county the good farmer is either making money or making both ends meet; the indifferent or bad farmer is loudest in complaints. In other words, the farmer is like most other business men."

Odd though it may seem, high rents are an incentive to intensive farming. If a man is paying £1000 a year for a couple of hundred acres he must produce good crops in plenty or go under. In Holland, where wages are 35s. a week and women and girls are in demand at something over 20s. a week, the farming is better than in a great part of Kesteven and Lindsey, where prices of rent and labour are lower (32s.). In Holland there is a shortage of men and women for the fields, elsewhere the supply is fully equal to the demand, save where some engineering shops or factories attract the labourer. Cottages are good,

and perquisites include potatoes, bacon, free rent and free cartage. It is indescribably pleasant to spend a few days in a county where all hard-working men may look for an adequate reward.

The cost of fenland farming is heavy, a drainage rate of ten shillings per acre on fen and warpland is one of the charges that other counties do not know, but land so rich can carry heavy burdens and make light of them. Outside the fen and silt areas prosperity is hard to woo; round Louth, for example, I found some neglected farms, and certain of the big landowners are forced to cultivate land of their own that they would be glad to let. Naturally the men whose farms are unlet, or whose crops are being grown at a loss, agree that agriculture is past praying for; those who are turning every acre to advantage are heard to admit that the position is not bad, though in regard to certain disabilities they could wish it better. Most money is lost on unresponsive soil, even where the rent is no more than 7s. 6d. per acre.

While some farms pay with the aid of an abundance of "artificial," Chilean nitrate being in great demand where the soil has not a heavy store of nitrogen, much land goes for years without manure. Such is the natural fertility of the fen soil that, while many farmers thrive by reason of sound knowledge, others prosper without it. I was told that, even in the Holland Division, men buy artificials by the number instead of the name, and never think of submitting what they buy to analysis, though there is a County Station that would test it for them.

Smallholding thrives in Lincolnshire. The Holland County Division has 1300 men making money on 13,000 acres. At Sutton Bridge, where the rent is as high as £5 per acre, the tenants do well. At Rolleston, over the border in Nottinghamshire, the Government Settlement has thirty men, some farming up to sixty acres; there are no arrears of rent. It is impossible to satisfy the demand for smallholdings. One of the Lincolnshire authorities said: "We have a real land-hunger here, and we cannot feed more

than a small part of the hungry." Yet the house and cow experiment, the cottage with one or two or three acres attached, failed to attract the agricultural labourer. His day's work is heavy and suffices him. Apparently men want to take their chance and get a holding, so that in return for such work as no trade union would suffer they may acquire an independence and a status. Perhaps the labourer would be better content with the half-acre allotment proposed by the Liberal Land Commission. Such a grant would be workable, even in his scanty leisure.

For one who goes through the three agricultural counties of Lincolnshire, visiting each centre in turn, endeavouring to ascertain the facts of the situation, only one conclusion is possible. It is that the men with brains, energy and sufficient capital are either making money or holding their own, that inefficiency, whatever the cause, is heavily penalized and that the advent of the motor-car has not been an unmixed blessing to farmers. It takes men very readily to more markets than they need attend, and encourages some of them to discuss troubles that may yield to treatment on the farm, but will never mend in the market-place. This is not the unconfirmed opinion of a visitor; it is the view of many men who have studied conditions closely, and who, though their interests are bound up in agriculture, feel that the only way of meeting the situation is to recognize its salient features.

SLEAFORD, *June*.



CHAPTER IX

LINCOLNSHIRE ABOVE HOLLAND

KESTEVEN and Lindsey, the two northern agricultural counties of Lincolnshire, do not share the exceptional good fortune of the Holland Division in any large measure. Consequently, those who farm there are extremely anxious to impress upon the stranger a warning that he must not be deceived by the prosperity he has met on his way to their areas.

"We can hardly make two ends meet," says the farmer of Kesteven, cheerfully ignoring the fact that at least one-third of the area of his county consists of a good rich soil.

"We know nothing but trouble," says the farmer of Lindsey, forgetting that the so-called "Island" of Axholme, in the north-west of his county, and a considerable tract to the south-east, are, and have proved, rich enough to make large fortunes for those who know how to take advantage of opportunities.

The Lincoln heath between Sleaford and the cathedral city is red earth on limestone, and grows a very fine quality of malting barley. Malting works belonging to one of the biggest brewers in the kingdom are at Sleaford, and Lincoln is second to no market in the county for the sale of the grain they seek. The difference between the corn used for malting and the corn used for grinding is expressed in the price. As much as 90s. a quarter may be paid by the maltster, while 36s. is as much as the man who sells for grinding should hope to get. From Lincoln down to Boston stretch the rich fenlands, black silt on clay, where they say that fifteen tons of potatoes to the acre may be raised in a good year; in the northern districts such returns are unknown. In the Kesteven county, and in Lindsey, wages fall from the 35s. paid in Holland to 32s., but men are not badly off, because they have certain perquisites. Their employer gives them a fixed

amount of bacon every year, generally about 250 lb., together with a few hundredweights of potatoes, and a decent house or cottage rent-free. The farm-workers' cottages are sound structures, and appear to be kept in good condition. In addition to house, potatoes and bacon, the farm-labourer may claim free cartage for his coal. In the general conditions of his life he is considerably better off than the workers of such counties as Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Sussex.

It is on the Northern Wold that the Lincolnshire farmers have the most trouble. The soil is not rich; there is no speciality farming, men appear to have heard about sugar-beet only in the last year, and consequently have lost the best of the market, and at the time of my visit they had been badly affected by the spring drought, and the subsequent rain had not brought conditions back to normal. There are farms in Lindsey that command no better rent than 7s. 6d. per acre, and many practical men with whom I have talked are of opinion that bad land is dear at any price, and good land is worth any rent that is not definitely extravagant. The men in South Lincolnshire who are paying £5 an acre and over are, as a rule, making much more money than the men who are paying a few shillings and struggling with an agricultural proposition that can never really be a sound one.

Perhaps the richest part of North Lincoln is in the Island of Axholme, which appears to consist of land won from the River Trent by a curious system known as warping. The principle is similar to that followed on the Essex marshlands, where the writer spent many years. A tract of land is selected and banked, and a connexion is made with the River Trent. At high tide the selected land is flooded. At lowest ebb the water is run off through the sluice-gates, but it leaves a certain amount of silt on the ground. Admission and return of the river-water over a period of about three years leave a depth of perhaps four feet of silt of extraordinary richness. The river is then excluded altogether, and the rains wash the salt out of the soil; after

which cropping begins. This practice of warping was started by Dutchmen in the early years of the Stuarts, and the stubborn farmers resisted it very strenuously, even going so far as to destroy the banks and sluices because the new development interfered with their sport; in those days the lowlands of Lincolnshire from the Wash to the Humber were a haunt of wild birds innumerable. Nowadays the North Lincolnshire farmers bless the warplands. They have provided them with magnificent crops of wheat and potatoes, this last being second only to those grown in the limestone district. The regulation of drainage ensures good heart in any weather, and enables the farmer to stand drought. There is a general return of eight to ten tons of potatoes per acre on warpland.

They are planting sugar-beet on the "Island." There is very little milk production, the minimum wage is never a maximum wage, many men earn a couple of pounds a week. There are no orchards and no market-gardening, most of the produce is marketed at Doncaster, Brigg and Scunthorpe. The largest consignments of potatoes go to Lancashire, the five-ton rate being 14s. 2d. per ton there as against £1 a ton to London, while the grower gets a better chance of a fair return in the north than he does in the Metropolis; where so many highly skilled market-men lie in wait for growers.

Generally speaking, it would appear that the farmers of Lindsey and Kesteven are losing money on the bad lands, and either holding their own or making money elsewhere, but it is only fair to record the impression that the men who have the most to complain about were never the best farmers. Some of the work on the land that is said to yield little or nothing for effort does not appear to be of high-class order. One of the most experienced agents in the county expressed to the writer the opinion that good farmers can make money in Lincolnshire to-day, or that, even if they are not so fortunate, they can avoid loss. Market conditions are bad, the discrepancy between what the grower receives and what the consumer pays is so

marked that nothing but high-class farming can help. The man who is not prepared to put every ounce of energy into his job, and accept hard labour as the price of prosperity, or even the approach to it, is likely to fall on evil times.

ISLE OF AXHOLME, *June.*



INTERLUDE

THE PESSIMIST

THE old grizzled farmer who lives in a house as dilapidated as himself was in a pessimistic mood. "It's no good talking to me about farming," he said; "there's no money in it, and there's no hope in it. I've been on the land all my life, so I know.

"Just a hundred acres," he went on, "and I've got it nearly all under the plough; nobody can say I haven't done the land as well as possible."

We walked over it together and I noticed that round the cultivated fields there was a rim of waste-land, sometimes ten and twelve feet deep; the hedges had not been properly cut nor layered, and had great gaps at the bottom; the ditches had not been cleaned for a long time, and weeds were thriving abundantly.

"I've got two men working for me," said the farmer, "good men, too, though I say it, and we none of us spare ourselves, yet we can't make it pay."

"What did you dress this field with?" I asked him, in the course of our walk.

"I get it from town," he said, "Mr ——'s No. 3 mixture, and very good stuff it is. I don't know what's in it, but I suppose he does. I have always kept to it; it does me very well."

We went into the yards and saw some bullocks that he had been fattening, heavy and rather bony beasts, not in their first youth.

"I sold four of them last week," he remarked mournfully, "and I reckon I must have lost pretty well £10 on that bunch—it may be more, but I don't keep accounts so I don't know, and perhaps it's a good thing too."

"Pigs are a good trade," he continued. "I have made a little money on my pigs. I have got a beautiful large black sow in here, she will be farrowing this week."

We went into the shed where the animal lay at length

on a large bed of rather dirty straw, and I noticed that there were no rails round it and that the sow was lying right up against one of the walls.

"Don't you think," I suggested, "that if you had rails round here it would be safer?"

"No," he said decisively, "that's one of the new-fangled ideas we hear such a lot about. I must have bred many hundreds of pigs in my time, and I suppose I do as well as my neighbours with them. No," he went on in reply to another question, "I don't keep cows any more; I used to, and folk from the village used to come up and buy my milk, and glad to get it, but there has been such a lot of trouble of late years that I've given it up. You've got to do this, that and the other, and it isn't worth while. I never cared much for milk myself, nor did my wife. I think all we have in the house is tinned."

Our chat over, I sought the road; but some weeks later a cross-journey brought me into the neighbourhood of the farm, and I took a sudden interest in finding out how the black sow had fared, so I left the car at the corner of the lane and walked through the garden to the outbuildings. The farmer was not there—he had driven with his wife to market in the old gig, of which one sees so few on the road to-day—but one of his men was carrying a pail of food to the sow, and I asked him about her farrow.

"She had nine," he said, "but she has only got three left; she laid on six of them. She's a big creature," he went on, "and when she gets right up against a wall they don't get much chance, poor little dears. That's a pity, with the price of pork as it is."

As I went back to the car I recalled the old man's words: "It's no good talking to me about farming; there's no money in it and there's no hope in it. I've been on the land all my life, so I know."

I have picked out this case, because the man of whom I write is not likely to see and be hurt by it; he told me that he doesn't read newspapers or books. But it is fair to say that he is the representative of a type. There are

INTERLUDE: THE PESSIMIST

hundreds like him, men who live poorly when times are good, and come near to striving when times are bad. But they do not spare themselves. Day after day they are busy, even though their work be what they would define as "muddling about." Under pre-War conditions they had a fair chance, to-day they have none. Their produce is all of the second or third class, and they must take what the market will offer. Nothing can save them; if we had Protection to-morrow they would still go under. Latter-day conditions have found them unprepared, and they are being ground to extinction between the upper millstone of high prices for what they buy, and the nether millstone of low prices for what they sell. It is impossible not to sympathize, it is impossible to help them.

HORNCASTLE, *June.*



CHAPTER X

IN THE EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE

THE East Riding of Yorkshire may be divided very roughly into three parts. A few miles in from the coast we have the Plain of Holderness running as far as Beverley on the west and consisting of heavy clay-land. Then comes the great Central Wold range, from Flamborough Head right through the county, about fifteen or sixteen miles wide; that is the difficult district, ill supplied with water, where sheep and barley are the mainstay, and agricultural depression is at its worst. West of Market Weighton and as far as Selby and Howden comes deep loamy soil, on which potatoes and roots are grown and where sugar-beet is likely to become, in the near future, a very important factor in the agricultural situation. There are two factories to be served, one a little way out of York to the north-west, at Nether Poppleton, the other at Selby. On the extreme south of the East Riding, where the Humber divides Yorkshire from Lincolnshire, there is a long stretch of warpland. It runs roughly south and east from Selby, as far as Brough, starts again at Pawle, and includes Sunk Island.

On the Wolds, little can be raised save sheep and barley, while, owing to the rough climatic conditions, there is a very brief period available for effective seeding. Labour is not easily obtainable and farmers complain eloquently of the restrictions on hours which leave climatic conditions out of account. Harvest is often affected by the sea-mists, which may hold work in suspense until within an hour of midday. On the Wold farms the percentage of grass is very small and the grass itself poor. The cost of arable farming was hard to bear in 1926, and there is no doubt that, while some farmers have been forced out of business, more than a few farms are waiting for tenants. I heard of one round about 1000 acres, part of a very big estate; it is said to be on offer, free of rent and rates for three years, to the farmer

who will bring it back into condition. The old adage, "one year's seeding seven years' weeding," is understood very well here.

An agriculturist who employs a very considerable number of workers on a four-figure acreage declared roundly that the East Riding agricultural labourer is the best workman in England. In summer he gets 35s. for a 52 hours week; in winter the hours are reduced to 48. Harvest is a matter of arrangement; he has free milk but pays 3s. for his cottage. All Sunday work is overtime, and there is a fair amount of piece-work at hedging and the singling of turnips.

On the Wolds, with their chalky subsoil, the barley turns out well in good years and maltsters are glad to buy it, but, as one farmer pointed out, a single heavy rain in harvest time may knock 10s. a quarter off the value of the crop. Weather is always the deciding factor throughout this inclement area, and no Government can rightly be held responsible for an extra and unnecessary supply of wind and rain, though one farmer told me grimly that whether it could or not, he had supported the ruling party for the last time. I have heard it said that even Signor Mussolini cannot control the elements, but this statement must be accepted with reserve; it was made by one who is not in sympathy with Fascism.

I found on the Wolds an optimist with a very large holding, who, while he wants certain things that Government only can give him, will never own himself beaten. He thinks there should be a tax on imported malt and barley, and that the Government should do something to control combines and rings. As an example of the way in which the farmer is overcharged, he quoted the case of rock phosphate. This is now selling at a very low price, but superphosphate which used to be £2 now costs £3.

His flock of 1000 sheep comes to him chiefly from the clay-lands of Holderness, where they breed a Leicester-Oxford cross. The best and most promising lambs are sold to the breeders, the second-best are bought by the

Wold farmers for fattening on roots and are sold out about March when the food supply is exhausted. It happens that the great market of Leeds is short of mutton at this season and looks to the East Riding for its requirements. Trouble comes if the farmer has grown too many roots and has bought heavily, and all his neighbours are in a like state; then the consignments to Leeds in March are so large that they exceed the demand and the price falls off. In this Wold country they do not keep many beasts. Few farmers have much grass, and what there is is worth very little, so that cake and roots are wanted and the cost of the former often brings stock-keeping out of the area of profit, particularly when men keep bullocks to sell at three years.

Sugar-beet is coming in. One farmer told me he has nearly 100 acres as a first experiment, and that the Selby factory has contracted for 8000 acres in the season before us. He believes that here, as in Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincoln, sugar is going to save the situation.

There is very little milk sold in the East Riding. A few farmers set up dairies, but prices killed them. A farmer told me that he did not care to thresh his corn in the autumn because it keeps so much better in the stack, but in a recent year he was forced to thresh everything except one stack, which he kept through the winter; it had ten quarters of wheat less than the average of the other stacks, and he admitted that rats were the cause. Allowing the price of wheat to be round about £3, his loss would have been well over £25, more than enough to have built some steadles and kept vermin away, not for one year, but for his lifetime. It is a little astonishing to find, as one goes through the country, that many farmers still add to their own troubles by their refusal to guard against loss that is easily preventible, and by their reluctance to consider new forms of cultivation. So far as rats are concerned, few farmers appear to realize the cost of their maintenance. They are satisfied if, after keeping their corn through the winter, they surround the stacks with wire netting, and

bring in a few dogs with the threshing machine. I remember one farmer telling me with pride that he accounted for nearly 200 rats in three days.

"I don't think a score got away," he said, and appeared a little annoyed when I told him that any one pair that escaped could produce more children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in a twelvemonth than would be needed to repopulate his next stacks in still more generous fashion.

HOLDERNESS, *June*.



INTERLUDE

THE COST OF PAUPERISM

YOU will be told a part of this story in the village; for the sequel you must go to the town some six miles away. As I sometimes stay in the town and frequently visit the surrounding country, I am able to recall the simple recital from start to finish. There is no word of exaggeration here, nothing has been added or taken away.

Seth Thomas—this name will serve—had worked for many years on a mixed farm in East Anglia. The land is good but heavy, a man must have plenty of strength if he is to carry out the ordinary acts of husbandry unaided by labour-saving machinery. The farmer who tills the land is an ordinary, hard-working, shrewd, honest man, and Seth Thomas, who served him, has a wife and four children, and earned 32s. a week, out of which he had to find half-a-crown for rent. His children were all in the first days of their schooling, the eldest would not be available for work for some years.

Seth Thomas had no allotment, but the garden is a moderate one and he managed to carry on, in the normal state of hopeless, helpless poverty, until a little while ago, when his master sent for him and said: "Thomas, you will have to leave at Michaelmas because things are bad and I am going to put more land down to grass. I have nothing against you, and I'll give you a good character, but I can't help myself. I have lost money on my corn and I have to cut my plough-land down."

Against this decision there could be no appeal, and Seth Thomas, after trying vainly to get another job, and finding all doors closed against him, took the only possible step; he went to the workhouse with his wife and four children. Later on I had an opportunity of inquiring into the cost of his maintenance and learned that the Thomas family

was costing the ratepayers £5, 10s. per week, while the man himself was utterly broken and unhappy because, being a worker at heart, he grieved for the loss of his independence.

On the material side he was better off; he and his family had better food and more of it; the State, in its official capacity, will not condemn a man to endure the privations that must follow when 29s. 6d. serves six people for rations, fire, lighting and the rest for seven days. They were all warm and they had nourishing food, but they were paupers, and since the splendid work in corn production, that Seth Thomas could do at need, remains undone, he is one of those whose compulsory idleness adds to the nation's food bill. So that, in order to estimate the loss to the State, we have to add his worth as a food producer to the charge upon the rates.

Put Seth Thomas on two or three acres, give him the credit to purchase a pig and a few head of poultry, and to make a start, and within a few months he would be feeding his family and selling sufficient surplus to clothe them. The land necessary to provide him with the opportunity is there, but it has been deliberately put out of cultivation, and now yields indifferent grass in place of good corn.

If the case of Seth Thomas were exceptional there would be nothing much to say, except that it is unfortunate. But you could multiply instances throughout the length and breadth of Engand, because in all directions land is falling down to grass, and where it falls, many sturdy food producers fall with it. Surely the first of all the assets that a nation needs for its prosperity is the ability to till the land and to produce the food by which we all must live. But, as things stand to-day, we find it not only possible, but reasonable, to take the men who have this gift, remove them from the land they are well qualified to serve, and drive them to a workhouse to perform tasks to which they are not accustomed. The land they love and understand falls out of cultivation, the ratepayer, already taxed

to the very limit of his capacity to pay, is called upon to make further sacrifices. The policy is as blind as it is cruel, as cruel as it is blind.

In the old days, when men were employed in far greater numbers on the land, it was customary to remove them to the workhouse as soon as they could no longer yield a profit to their masters. Until the poor man's Magna Charta—the Old Age Pension—changed the face of social England, the prospect of those who had striven valiantly in the fields was a hopeless one indeed. But in those hard times the men who were driven to the unions were past their prime; they had given their all. To-day men in the full enjoyment of their strength and vigour are removed from the fields, stamped with the brand of pauperism and sent to eat their hearts out. Something is rotten in the State of England.



CHAPTER XI

INTENSIVE GRASS CULTIVATION

IN the spring of the present year the Ministry of Agriculture summoned the County Organisers to Caius College, Cambridge, to attend a Conference on intensive grass-land cultivation. This new system, practised at Hohenheim and elsewhere in Germany, came, in the first instance, from the Channel Islands, where a Jersey farmer originated the idea, and explained it to some visitors from the Fatherland, who were prompt to recognize its advantages. The principle is to raise grass to the point of its highest value, graze, dress, and pass stock over it again and again. In this way it is possible to keep cows in full milk without the aid of a concentrated proteid ration.

One of the men who addressed the company assembled from all parts of England was a Yorkshire farmer, on whose land the intensive grass cultivation has been carried out with success, and in the early summer of the year I visited his holding on a hillside overlooking Middlesbrough. I found that 50 cows were being fed on a series of five-acre sections, which are divided by post and wire-rail fencing, and supplied with water. The whole field reserved for the experiment received an initial dressing of carbonate of lime, superphosphate, kainit and Dryer's flue dust, and during the experiment the plots were given further dressings of sulphate of ammonia and nitrate of lime. The effect of winter dressing is to bring the grass on before the normal time so that at the end of the first week in April the farmer was able to turn the cows out on to pastures already four inches high, while on pastures that had received no treatment it was impossible to feed stock until the beginning of May. For the first few weeks the cows are brought in at night, and after that are left out even through May frosts, which, apparently, are quite harmless to animals that are enjoying so stimulating a proteid ration as young grass provides.

The system in vogue has been well thought out. When the cows come on to a new pasture they remain on it just long enough to eat their fill, and are then taken off, either to some rough land or to land they have already used, and kept there until they are wanted in the byre. In this way their clean grass is not soiled to any serious extent. I should say that the cows here are milked three times a day. When, at the end of five days, they are moved on to a new four- or five-acre strip, dry cows or heifers are turned on to the section they have left in order to clear it up; the ground is further enriched with periodical dressings of sulphate of ammonia. On ordinary grass-land in this part of Yorkshire early summer grazing is worth maintenance and two gallons of milk; under the intensive system it is worth maintenance and four gallons. Last year the actual saving in concentrated food paid the entire cost of manures, labour, water and fencing, and left a handsome profit.

On this farm the annual cost of intensive cultivation amounts to £4, 6s. per acre, and the farmer reckons to get three weeks without concentrates in the spring, and perhaps another ten days in the autumn, so that he has nearly five extra weeks of open feeding, and it is necessary in adding to the ration to give carbohydrates rather than proteids, because the proteid value of young grass is so high.

The interesting feature about this Yorkshire grass-land experiment is its success in producing really beautiful greensward with an entire absence of nettles, thistles and neglected patches. The cows graze very closely, for everything is young and tasty, neither grass nor weed being on flower, and by the time they return, after having made a round of the strips, the land has recovered from their earlier visit and is ready to welcome them again.

The second experimental farm I visited is in quite another part of England—Wootton Bassett, near Swindon, in Wiltshire—and here Chilean nitrate of soda is the mainstay. Early spring dressing given in March on the six plots of four acres each was 3 cwt. of 30 per cent. super-

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phosphate and 2 cwt. of 20 per cent. potash. The nitrate of soda was applied at the rate of $1\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. per acre; four dressings had been given since March, when I visited the plots on 23rd July, and one further dressing was due. At that time, though the six plots had been fed bare three times, the herbage was like a pile carpet. The procedure varied from that followed near Middlesbrough. On 8th April 118 ewes and 157 lambs were turned on to the grass for three weeks, then the land was left until the 5th of May, when 35 cows followed. These fed on the four acres for four days, and 16 followers took their place, until the strip was cleared. The field on which the experiment is being carried out has a good, deep, loamy soil, and with ordinary treatment, in good years, has yielded upwards of two tons of grass to the acre, but next to the six four-acre plots there is a residue that has not been dressed either with the superphosphates, the potash or the nitrates of soda, and there the grass, though plentiful, is very coarse, rough, and full of bents. On the six plots the herbage suggested that the season was mid-May rather than late July, and Mr Hervey White, on whose land the experiment is being carried on, is of opinion that this system of intensive grass cultivation is going to double the carrying capacity of the grass-lands. It may do more than this, but he thinks it will certainly not do less.

So far as one could judge, the action of nitrate of soda is quicker than that of the sulphate of ammonia, which is used in the north, and the grass appeared to be of better quality, but, against this, one must put the fact that the field on the farm near Middlesbrough was not of the same quality as that on Mr Hervey White's farm. In all probability the Wiltshire grass would provide, in early summer, for maintenance and three gallons, while in Yorkshire, grass could never yield more than maintenance and two at the best time of the year. Climate forbids.

The importance to the farmer of the two methods lies in the possibility of avoiding a monopoly. In the north, manuring is conducted with the products of Sir Alfred

Mond's great Combine, which is producing synthetic nitrogen at Bellingham in Northumberland. In Wiltshire Chilean nitrate of soda is the mainstay, and it is claimed for this that the iodine content is of great value to the soil. Competition between the two powerful interests must, in the long run, help the farmer who has suffered, and is still suffering, from the activities of monopolists in so many fields of enterprise.

There can be no suggestion that the ground has been covered or that practice has been surveyed adequately by a visit to two stations. Some eighty experiments are being carried out in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland; they extend from Morayshire to Cornwall, from County Cork to Norfolk. Preliminary reports from the most of these centres should be available in November or December.

It is quite clear that, with certain modifications, intensive grass-land treatment will serve to fatten bullocks, or that it will at least provide them with the proteid part of their ration. If, as seems likely, in the near future the farmer will concentrate his endeavours upon producing beef at eighteen months instead of two and a half or three years, new questions must arise. It is obvious that the existing intensive method of grass-land is best suited to mature animals, and that what is called baby-beef might not have the quality of resistance and endurance that would enable it to take advantage of the prolonged period of grazing, at any rate in the northern counties. Yet it is an interesting fact that the experiment of intensive grazing has already been tried on sheep, and that, in the North Riding, there is one flockmaster who is running 90 sheep, ewes, hoggs and lambs on a six-acre pasture divided into its separate sections. The sheep spend three days on each acre and then go on to the next, so that they are actually back again on their first grazing-ground within three weeks. In July they had been moving in procession from acre to acre since March, and the results were said to be satisfactory. When we remember that the Wold farmers of Yorkshire reckon that one acre offers

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maintenance for one sheep, it is clear that big changes are in sight, though on high exposed land, where the grass is bad, it may be quite impossible to improve the pasture sufficiently to make intensive grass cultivation practicable. Yet there must be strips of medium pasture that could and would respond to suitable treatment, and so enable the flockmaster to follow in the footsteps of the dairy farmer and the bullock fattener.

The question then arises, is all this energy likely to reward the farmer or the middleman? Will the price of "artificial" be raised against the farmer so soon as he has learned to rely upon them for keeping his pastures up to the necessary level of excellence? Will the increased milk production tend to harden the hearts of the Combines, so that the price of milk, to them at least, is lower than ever, while the public continues to pay its threepence a pint in summer and more in winter? Will the man who rears stock see it bought by the market-ring and resold now that Lord Fermoy's well-meant Bill has reached the Statute Book?

Here we have the crux of the whole situation. Improved methods of production may mean much or they may mean nothing; in the long run all depends upon marketing, and at present the marketing conditions are such that clever business men and clever rogues derive the greatest benefit from them.

I think it is on this account that farmers are suspicious of all new movements towards increased production; they have some sort of idea that if they lose £100 a year by sending x beasts or y gallons of milk to the market, they will double their losses if they consign $2x$ and $2y$. Could the Government solve the market problem, even at the risk of penalizing the profiteers, they would go a long way to setting agriculture on its feet. There is, unfortunately, no reason to believe that they will try.

MARTON, NORTH RIDING, *June*.
WOOTTON BASSETT, WILTS, *July*.

CHAPTER XII

THE FOREIGNER AT THE BREAKFAST- TABLE

I HAVE been spending some time among the light-land farmers of the north who grow barley and rye at little profit, and are looking to put their small areas of heavier land under some crop that is safer and more profitable than wheat, and I have questioned a few of them about their most popular home foods. Curiously enough, they have all expressed a taste for something in the way of porridge, or its innumerable substitutes; they do not always eat these things themselves, but there is no difficulty in discovering that the children like them. The farmer's table is not considered complete without one or another of the score or more of corn preparations that come, almost without exception, from across the Atlantic.

Rye provides an interesting example of the national method of doing things in the wrong way. The farmer finds it hard to grow rye at a profit. He is glad to have a crop that does not show a loss, and the grain is exported to France, Belgium and Iceland. Now the Swedes eat a great deal of rye bread and prepare a large number of rye biscuits, and certain of these biscuits are sent over to England; where they fetch very high prices—from 1s. 3d. to 1s. 6d. per lb. The English grower of rye does not look to get more than 1d. per lb. for his crop.

What is the magic of the Swedish bakery that makes 1d. worth something between 1s. 3d. and 1s. 6d., and why, if this transformation can be effected in Sweden, can it not be brought about in England? It seems reasonable to suggest that good rye biscuits might be sold at a profit to all concerned for 6d. per lb., and that it would pay an enterprising biscuit maker to set up a factory somewhere on the light England lands where rye is grown.

In the same way, it is hard to see why the English housewife should be buying Force, Grapenuts, Wheat

Kernels, Shredded Wheat, Barley Kernels, Triscuit, Quaker Oats, and a number of other breakfast dishes from abroad, and paying a substantial price for them, when they could be produced from English grain in at least equal quality, for less money, to the profit of all concerned. It is amazing to think that, while the English corn-grower can get nothing more than an unsatisfactory price for his grain, foreign corn—probably not of the best—should command high prices on the English market when prepared in an appetizing fashion: 25 per cent. of British wheat goes to feed chickens, and more than 20 per cent. of our barley goes to feed pigs, and I suppose the greater part of our oats goes to feed Scotsmen. If business men, with good credentials and good determination to help the farmer, would specialize in the breakfast foods that have become so popular, they would be able to make a sure appeal, both to the patriotism and to the pocket of the housewife, and they would help the farmer to grow corn, because he asks for only a reasonable profit. He cannot dispense with wheat until he is absolutely forced to do so, because he needs the straw crop which goes to the yards and comes back to fertilize his fields, and he needs straw, too, for thatching, and of all the straws, wheat is incomparably the best. Rye, too, serves for litter, and oat straw has its definite value, while, though barley straw is comparatively worthless, the barley itself is always in demand, if only for pigs and poultry.

So the farmer continues to grow his grain and to look elsewhere for means to balance his losses, while clever gentlemen from the United States, Canada, and elsewhere bring corn foods into this country in vast quantities and at a price that would make the farmer prosperous. All that is wanted is a group of men with capital, initiative and sufficient resources to bring breakfast foodstuffs down to the price that would, while giving them a good return for their endeavour, put them within reach of all.

In this country national needs are not allowed to interfere with private predilection. The national health demands

wholemeal bread, but people are free to eat the emasculated product of the average bakery. In like fashion, the industry of a large part of England demands the use of rye, but the grain is boycotted for no apparent reason. In other countries, where necessity is a little sterner, such conditions are not tolerated.

In Italy, for example, Mussolini has compelled the people to live on home-grown wheat ; he will not suffer expensive imports. At present, or at least when I was in Italy, in the early spring, the bread was rather unpalatable, for the proportion of wheat offals was high, but in a little while the country will grow enough to produce palatable bread in sufficient quantities. There is a lesson here, if we would but take it to heart.



CHAPTER XIII

FARMERS OF DALE AND MOORLAND

WHEN you enter the wilder country of the North Riding, you find moors that derive their only value from the grouse that are shot in late summer and the sheep that pick up a scanty living through the second half of the year. On the farms, which are widely scattered, grass-land predominates, though there is some milk production, chiefly through associations like the Yorkshire Farmers Limited and the Wensleydale Pure Milk Society. With a few exceptions the holdings are small, and we find in this part of the country that curious but highly interesting feature the cottage farm, perhaps an eight- to ten-acre holding of meadowland with gaits for as many as five cows on good pasture belonging to the landlord. There are gaits for heifers too, for the cottage farmer probably rears a calf or two; he does not seem to take very kindly to pigs. At first sight you would think it was impossible for a man to earn a living on so small a place, but the cottage farmer keeps afloat, even through troublesome times, and the reasons are not far to seek.

In the first place he is a tremendous worker. His wife and his children, if they are of the right age, help him; he has, in his devotion to the land, something that makes him akin to the French, Belgium and German small farmer; he shows a fine contempt for hours and is rich in the assistance he receives from his family towards the efforts he makes in every direction to wrest a living from a small and reluctant acreage. The cottage farmer gets a good many odd jobs; he seeks to find employment on other men's land at haysel and harvest, and he contrives to pay a good rent, these holdings being the most heavily priced because, as a rule, they are in a high state of cultivation. While there is much land in that part of the country that fetches less than £1 an acre, it is quite easy to find a cottage farmer who, for his eight or ten acres, pays a rent of £24 or £30.

It goes without saying that he is a sturdy individualist who will never consent to consider co-operation in any shape or form, and he does not complain overmuch of the system of tenure which gives him no protection against a bad landlord; he holds from year to year, and when, for any reason, he goes there are plenty of men waiting to take his place. The demand exceeds the supply where cottage-holdings are concerned up here, and they breed a sturdy independent class.

If you travel from Kendal to Hawes, for example, and even to the east of the latter place, you find wild land, few houses, and large moorland sheep farms where even the tenant may not know, within a score, how many sheep he possesses; even a head of two thousand is not uncommon. Sheep farmers were doing well until a year or so ago because the price of mutton was good, and the most successful are the men who have sheep gaits on the moor for about half the year. They market at Kendal and Hawes, Leyburn and Richmond, and are very hard folk, who do not spare themselves or any of those associated with them. There is not a great deal of sport to tempt them from their holdings, though the Bedale country is near them—it stretches from Spennithorne to Northallerton; there are also a few packs that hunt the hare; grouse, of course, are out of reach. From Leyburn down to Northallerton farmers raise stock, and have lost money on it, because they cannot feed beef at a profit if they are going to keep it to be three years old, as their fathers and grandfathers did. Conditions have changed, and they have not all learned to change with them—here lies the secret of much agricultural distress, in and out of Yorkshire.

Extraordinary instances of successful endeavour are to be met from time to time. I heard of one man who is running a 100-acre farm single-handed, with some 20 acres arable. He seeks a little help for his haymaking and his harvest, but for the rest he works alone, and he recorded a profit last year of £50 after meeting his own frugal living expenses. A farmer of long experience, talking to the

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writer about the difficulties of earning a living and how they are surmounted in this wild region of wind and rain, where the summer comes late and will not linger, and winter prolongs its stay until the roses are out in the south, said bluntly: "Farmers about here are frugal. We can live where a townsman would starve, and that is why even in the worst years very few of us go under. Remember, too, that we have no big labour bill up here. A small man does not employ assistance, the big man can carry on with quite a small staff unless he has a milk business, and every one of us works from morning to night, often seven days a week. There is nothing else to do but to work up here, and it agrees with us. We have no time to complain."

RICHMOND, YORKS, *June.*



INTERLUDE

THE PROBLEM OF WAGES

THE market has been closed for an hour or two ; a little company of the farmers who travel home by the late afternoon train sat round the fire in the waiting-room.

"Forty-seven-and-six was all I got for my wheat to-day," said one.

"Bullocks were a bad market," said another, "they hardly pay for fattening."

"Nothing gets such a poor price as hay," said the third. "I sold two stacks this week for the rent and rates of the fields they came off."

"A rotten year," said the first. "Nobody makes money out of farming nowadays, unless he is a butcher or an auctioneer or a dealer. They're our real masters ; whatever profit there is, they take."

"I wonder, sometimes, how we are going to carry on," said one of the speakers. "I don't suppose there's a man in this waiting-room who has made money out of farming since 1921. If there is," and he looked round at the rather disconsolate company, "he might tell us how he has done it. We should all be very grateful I am sure."

Nearest the fire sat a little Victorian farmer with a hard, weather-beaten face set in a rim of grey whisker.

"You will never make farming pay," he said, "while you have Wages Boards. They are the real trouble. With stockmen and cowmen getting 36s. to 38s. a week, and your milk in the hands of the Combine, and your fat stock bought and resold by the ring, what do you expect? In the old days I paid men 12s. a week and they worked harder than they do now, and I never heard them grumble. Then a farmer had the chance of making a bit of money, and putting it aside for a rainy day ; now, what the landlord does not take, he must give to the men. It was a bad day for this country when they started Wages Boards."

INTERLUDE: THE PROBLEM OF WAGES

There was something like a flutter in the waiting-room. Men looked at one another as though each wanted to see what the effect of this outspoken statement would have upon his neighbour; he who had spoken noted the movement.

"Ah," he said, "I expect you all agree with me if you were to tell the truth, but some of you are afraid to say so."

"The men don't get a big wage according to the price of things," said one farmer cautiously. "Money doesn't go as far as it did."

"It is a lot to pay out," said another, "when there is next to nothing coming in."

"You can't do it," said the old man triumphantly. "In my business before the War I kept eight men, and they got 15s. a week. To-day I have got five and they get on an average about 34s. I am worse off, and the land's worse off, and the men grumble and tell you they can't do on the money."

The noise of the approaching train was heard; the farmers scrambled out to find limited accommodation, with no further facilities for intimate conversation.

This note of things heard provides vivid comment upon the existing conditions. Farmers of the rule-of-thumb kind are literally at their wits' end. Their best efforts along old lines can't save them, and a change of method is more to be feared than poverty. They are unable to stand up against the dealers and others who exploit their necessities. They will not co-operate, and if they join a co-operative society are seldom loyal to it. In their trouble they can see no way out, unless it is by penalizing those who work for them, and here the Wages Boards stand in the way.

As I walked down the village street I saw the light of a bicycle lamp coming nearer, and just past a cottage a lad jumped off his machine. I recognized him for one who had worked for a friend.

"Have you left High Hedges?" I asked him.

"Oh yes," he said, "some time ago. I am getting

25s. a week now instead of a guinea, and I'm promised a rise."

"Then you are not going back to the land?" I asked him.

"Oh no," he said; "my job with Mr —— the builder is much better than land work. I can get up a couple of pounds or even 45s. in another two or three years, and father's been on the land all his life and he is getting 36s. and works seven days a week."

In these two little records one may see and realize that nothing less than a national policy can provide a way of escape from present conditions.



CHAPTER XIV

THE SOLDIERS' FARM

AFTER the War, when Lord Gorell's scheme for the widespread development of general education was absorbing a great deal of energy, and a very considerable amount of money, an officer on the staff of General Maxse put forward a scheme of agricultural education for soldiers who were serving the last six months of their time.

He pointed out that nobody has more to contend with than the soldier whose time of service has expired. He possesses neither house nor home, he has lost his early connexions, he has no job, he is forced upon the dole; and to a man whose life has been clean, active and healthy the change is both disheartening and dangerous. He may well feel that his service has failed of reasonable recognition. These arguments carried weight, and the big experiment was started on derelict land at Catterick, in Yorkshire, where, as a result of abandonment of a war-time camp, weeds had taken possession and were seeding vast surrounding areas. The first thing to do was to graze the land clean, and cattle from Scotland did the job; then poultry and pigs were brought in, and a single cow, and soldiers were admitted to training. In this last six months of military service they passed from the strenuous discipline of their N.C.O.'s, and they were told that it was their job to discipline themselves. If they succeeded, well and good; if they gave trouble they would be sent back to their respective camps and would serve the rest of the time on the drilling-ground instead of on the farm. But the men chosen were selected with care and they had the root of the matter in them—an enthusiasm for the soil. So they did not grumble then, and do not grumble now, at a working day that starts in summer time at five o'clock and ends round about nine P.M.

The first intention was to take advantage of the Group Settlement Scheme in Australia, but just as the first group

was ready to start, Australia abandoned the scheme. Happily one of the leaders of Australian opinion happened to be in England at the time and came to Catterick, to be so impressed by what he saw that he made representations to his Government at home, and Australia agreed to take the Catterick-trained men. The Agent-General and the Premier of West Australia were among the visitors to the station. There has been no occasion to regret the decision; the constant stream that passes from Northern Yorkshire to far Australia has served the great Dominion well, the demand for the newcomers exceeds the supply, though the present aim of the administration is to send a thousand men a year for overseas settlement. This will be done in future, from the vantage-ground of a new centre in Wiltshire, by keeping the headquarters as a depot for the first training and then sending drafts to satellite farms, whence they will go abroad. For married men the course is six months, and in that time the wives are trained to milk, to make butter, to look after poultry and to feed pigs and calves, and the children are trained to help, if of suitable age and inclination.

The term for single men is shorter, because such men go on to the Australian farms as assistants, live in, and add to their knowledge there. It is said, with confidence, that if a man can stand Catterick training no farm job on earth can have any terrors for him, for he is handled with the definite intention of making every other job appear easy. The effect of course is to demilitarize the trainees. They learn to forget that they are part of a military machine, they begin to look upon themselves as members of the civil community. Though they are subject to army discipline, they are working, to a large extent, on their honour. At the time of my visit, the staff at Catterick, if it had been on a military footing, would have consisted of thirty officers. There were two, and these sufficed, but the work is so carefully outlined and supervised that many men only get their discharge from the army when they are on the ship that is taking them to Australia to start a new life.

When Catterick is not full, ex-soldiers are admitted for training if their maintenance is paid by any interested body, and, while the practice of bringing in men from the outside world to mingle with those who have had a long period of service in the army is extremely valuable, the cost of training is very small.

Farming at Catterick has covered as much as 1000 acres—at present there are 300 in cultivation. Military camps surround the colony on all sides, because, since we lost the Curragh, Aldershot and Salisbury Plain can no longer suffice the nation's military needs. But, within the limits of the available land, excellent farming is carried out, and, side by side with the farm, there are shops where the men can learn a useful trade, because due recognition has been given to the fact that overseas a man must be able to do much of the work that can be done for him at home. There are carpenters' shops where the men learn to make tables, chairs, doors, cupboards, gates, and all manner of things that they may want in the far land that is their goal; there is a bricklayer's shop where amateurs make an excellent showing. One who left the army for a job at home was earning nearly £5 a week as a result of his Catterick training. There is a shoemaker's shop where, after six months' experience, men can turn out excellent boots and shoes, and there are other opportunities for specialized treatment for those who seek them. Some of the men who come to Catterick know of a job that they can qualify for in their own homes, and seek a special line side by side with their agricultural training; if they have a definite call they are encouraged to follow it. Nursery- or market-gardening and the cultivation of flowers under glass are a part of the work that is taught there.

Turning to the larger side of farming practice, we find that everything is run on extremely modern lines, although a large part of the finance of the undertaking must be supplied from profits. The fashion in which the work is carried out suggests the Farm Institute rather than the military camp. For example, there are costings everywhere.

The price at which a pig yields a pound of pork is known to a farthing, it has been brought down to 3½d. here; the cost of egg production and the value of chickens are fully understood; the milk is recorded. There are 2500 hens, and it is said that each has a name, perhaps because Major Stibbard—who is in control of the camp and to whose initiative the Catterick scheme owes its inception—is frankly and avowedly a humanitarian, and his predilection in this regard strikes the keynote of the settlement. You can go up to the bulls or horses, the pigs or cows, and they do not flinch from or resent your touch. The chickens follow the visitor about; ill treatment of any animal is a thing unknown. When pigs are killed, or a sick animal has to be destroyed, a humane killer is used, and every man who is taking the farm course is instructed in its use. All material produced on the farm is consumed in the camps. There is no waste, and the business is undeniably self-supporting. It has progressed apace since five years ago when the pioneers found themselves in possession of a nettle patch and a large altruistic scheme that had not reached the plane of manifestation. To-day it stands acknowledged as one of the forces that will help to build up the great Dominion of Australia, while giving men who have served their country an opportunity of developing what is best in them in the interests of the Empire.

There is an indescribable attitude of quiet enthusiasm about the Vocational Training Centre at Catterick. It takes possession of the visitor when he has touched the fringe of the work, and as he passes through, seeing how efficiently it is carried out in every detail, and how it is making men happy and self-reliant, he finds it impossible not to share the feelings of those who are responsible for the organization. He does not seek to belittle them with praise, but he takes off his hat to them, and wishes their work God-speed, here and in the new settlement.

CATTERICK, *June*.

P.S.—The camp is now (January, 1928) in Wiltshire.

INTERLUDE

SOMETHING OUT OF A TIN

THE dusk had fallen ; the solitary village shop, with its two oil lamps, cast a pleasing glow on to the roadway. It revealed half-a-dozen women going in or out. Business seemed brisk, and I asked the owner if it was due to any special cause. She shook her head.

"This is always my busy time," she said. "As soon as it grows dark, and the men are coming in from the fields, the wives hurry in here to get something for them. I sell more at this time of the day than any other, and it is nearly all tinned things."

"What are the favourites?" I inquired.

"There's some likes tinned salmon," she said, "and there's others fancy sardines, and if there's not enough money for those things, I've got some very nice brands of potted meat or fish, 5d. each. They give a man a relish."

"I wonder if they give him anything else," I said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That's no concern of mine," was her reply. "Time my husband was alive—he was a carpenter—I'd have cooked something for him when he came in from work ; he shouldn't have fed anyhow. We used to bake our own bread and make our own jam, and cure our own pig, and in the village here there isn't a woman who bakes or makes anything for herself, except the Sunday dinner. They would rather buy a pot of cheap jam and let the fruit they can't eat raw rot on the trees. As for a baking-oven of the old kind, there isn't one in the parish. But there, it isn't for me to quarrel with my living. People have a right to what they want."

So far as my inquiries have gone—and they have been made over the length and breadth of England—the same story holds good. The father of the family, the sons who share the heavy work of the land, the daughters who shun

domestic service and accept a little locally only on condition that they are allowed to go home to sleep, are all being fed on food substitutes, or things out of tins, from which, in many cases, the real worth has long departed.

What is the prime cause of this condition of things? It is, I think, twofold.

In the first place, the agricultural labourer's wife would appear to have lost heart. Her struggle against penury has disheartened her, largely because there was a period during the War when her husband brought home very good wages, and she was able to live with some approach to comfort. When people have known nothing better than poverty they grow inured to it, but if they have had even a brief period of comparative affluence, the return to the old conditions is enervating. Consequently, the tendency grows to look to the village shop as a means of easing the work of the house.

The high price of fuel is another cause. You cannot cook without a good fire, and a good fire costs a lot of money to-day. So the housewife seeks the line of least resistance, and slowly but surely her husband and her family lose the strength and energy that we were wont to associate with the agricultural labourer. If you ask the farmer he will tell you that men cannot work to-day as they did in his father's time, cannot carry the same burdens, cannot spend the same hours at the plough, cannot cover the same ground. But he does not realize that they have lost their stamina because they are not being properly fed, and that if they had proper food they would have the requisite energy. Often he complains that they are slack.

It is not too much to say at present that many men are unable, at the end of a day's work, to summon up the necessary energy to do work for themselves, and one of the first steps towards real improvement in this direction will be a return to wholesome and sustaining foodstuffs, of which, at present, the rural worker gets little or none.

When you come to consider that his bread and his butter-substitute, his separated milk and his sugar, are compara-

INTERLUDE: SOMETHING OUT OF A TIN

tively devoid of nourishment, that the little meat he can eat is of the roughest imported variety, that his jam is a trade mixture and not always a healthy one, it is easy to see that the only truly sound food he eats is cheese. Down to the present no effective substitute for this has been devised by the people who are ready to poison the whole community for the sake of a little profit. But a cheap synthetic cheese that never knew milk or cream cannot be far away.

If men could recover their energy through the medium of sound food, and have the incentive that land would give them, we should be on the way to a merrier England than we have to-day.



CHAPTER XV

THE POULTRY-KEEPER'S PARADISE

MANY years ago a Lancashire cobbler, 'Tom Barron by name, descendant they tell you in the Preston country of many generations of cobblers, went to a lecture given by E. T. Brown, the well-known poultry expert, and came away with the feeling that poultry-keeping must be worth while. So he bought a setting of eggs, did well with it, and increased his stock steadily through several seasons. He found a ready market for his wares, but he also found that they took up much time that belonged of right to cobbling; he was faced with the question of reducing his birds or giving up his business. In the end he decided that, despite traditional bias, poultry-keeping rather than cobbling was his *forte*. He devoted himself entirely to chicken-rearing, made a great fortune, and is regarded to-day as the father of a huge industry that dominates the agricultural situation in Lancashire. He is still at work to-day, not because he has any occasion to take trouble, but because he has acquired a habit that he cannot relinquish.

Other men following in his footsteps have amassed money, but nobody has challenged his pride of place, and wherever you go among the hen-wives of the United Kingdom, and probably of Ireland too, you will find those who have, or claim to have, the Barron strain in their flock if it is anything better than a collection of mongrels. To-day all Lancashire, not excluding the Black Country, has a chicken run. From the labourer who keeps half-a-dozen birds in his back garden, to the nobleman who maintains nearly 50,000 head, and a great staff to supervise their needs and to dispose of anything from 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 eggs in the course of the year, all Lancastrians are poultry-keepers. They talk birds, they study points, they revel in the subtleties of selection and cross-breeding, they employ the latest devices. If they be

wealthy, their houses are lighted by electricity and the machinery employed to reduce labour involves a large initial outlay. Taking the small men who own an acre of land or less, as well as the big men who make returns that are placed on record, it is safe to say that at least a quarter, and possibly a third, of the poultry and eggs produced in England, Scotland and Wales come from Lancashire. Even to-day men will tell you that the game is not played out and that it is possible for anyone who has the capital necessary for a start to begin by earning a living and to end by making a fortune. Poultry-keepers work hard, but they keep their motor-cars, and they have glorious holidays at Blackpool, Southport, the Isle of Man and other homes of joyous entertainment.

The high level of their achievement is due to the proper use of the grey matter within their skulls; belonging to a county noted for its shrewdness, they have succeeded in solving the marketing problem. The Lancashire poultry-breeder sells nothing at a loss. The middleman may buy his new-laid eggs and keep them in a cellar until they are unfit to eat, and then unload them upon an unprotected public, but the poultry-farmer sent those eggs to market when they were new-laid, and the price was fixed by the Lancashire Federation of Poultry Societies, whose representatives meet every week at Preston, and the greater part of the eggs marketed there are bought by the Lancashire Egg Producers Society, and sent to selected points throughout the county where the demand was brisk.

The cities where industry is most centralized are Preston's chief patrons, and, vast though the supply is, the demand can exhaust it. The Lancashire consumer has his own particular taste that must be catered for; there are birds he likes and birds he won't look at. Certain breeds of chicken are anathema to him, others he favours highly. For example, among old birds the White Sussex are worth 6s. a dozen more than birds of any other breed, while if he is offered Faverolles, a breed that finds plenty of favour elsewhere, he will reject them with some

approach to indignation. But he will pay a fair price for what he wants, and the producer can make money.

The figures of poultry-keeping are very interesting. A good laying hen costs $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per week to keep (before the War the writer's accounts, carefully kept and dealing with a three-figure flock, showed a cost of $1\frac{1}{4}$ d.), and the annual profit, making no charge for labour, but after paying for rearing and allowing for losses, should be 7s. 6d. per bird. Geese cost 1s. for the egg, and can be run up to Christmas at a cost of about 2s. 6d., because it is well known that these birds get their living off the grass throughout the summer and autumn, and need only a little fattening at the end. The price is low and the profit high; a 10 lb. bird should yield up to 15s. on the Christmas market, and the total cost of producing and preparing it for the market will be 3s. 6d. A turkey that costs 25s. in the Christmas market probably cost 12s. to bring there; the profit on ducks comes largely through their eggs, but in Lancashire a good bird will fetch 6s. or 7s. at nine weeks.

It is of interest to consider the cost of setting up in poultry-keeping and what the possibilities are. One man should be able to look after 1000 birds; on the great farms they reckon one whole-time worker to 1250; 1000 can be kept on 5 acres of ground and will need ten houses. They say in Lancashire that it is possible for a man to run a cottage with 5 acres for his laying hens and 3 acres for rearing, at a total rent, including rates, of anything between 16s. and £1 per week. His houses, 30 by 10 feet, will cost him £50 apiece; his fencing, 2s. per yard; an incubator with 150 egg capacity, can be bought for £11, 10s. The practical man does not buy those incubators on which he must pay a heavy advertising bill; he inquires from men equally practical, and finds that there are several makes on the market that are reliable and more moderate in price. Careful calculation has shown that, whether the beginner starts with eggs or day-old chicks or pullets, the price by the time laying starts shows little

or no variation. His eggs are the cheapest, but he has the cost of incubating and upbringing; his day-old chicks are cheaper than pullets, but he has the risks of rearing; and his pullets, of course, are an expensive proposition, but they are over the danger period and are ready to lay.

In general terms, a man can start poultry-farming on a scale that would provide him with a good living if he has a capital of £1000. With ordinary luck his income should be £300 a year, if his luck be exceptional £350, and this is for utility egg-and-poultry production, and does not take into account the possibilities of selling settings at special prices, or of selling pedigree birds at a high figure. Should the time come when he can enlarge his plant and his stock he must be prepared to double it, because in that way he can employ the whole-time services of a man who will look after the next thousand for him. His land will not go sour if he applies lime—cob lime for choice—at the rate of 2 tons per acre every year. The birds are not disturbed or hurt in any way by the lime, and the land preserves its freshness. Some breeders put down basic slag every third year, but this manure has a very small lime content and its value is chiefly in improving the pastures.

Lancashire is a big agricultural county, but the sideline that it has taken from agriculture and developed in the footsteps of Mr Tom Barron has given it an astonishing measure of prosperity outside the purely industrial areas.

It is interesting to reflect that had some emergency cobbling kept Mr Tom Barron away from Mr Brown's lecture, Lancashire might have had comparatively few poultry to-day, the great industrial towns would have had no new-laid eggs and our bill from the foreigner for elderly eggs and stringy chickens would have been higher than it is. Already we have eggs coming from China, and of the method of collection in other countries I have one vivid memory.

Many years ago, when in South Morocco, some hundred and fifty miles from the coast, I came upon an egg collector

with a team of half-starved donkeys. He was buying eggs in the villages and paying from 2d. to 2½d. a dozen for them. They were packed in cases and sent on mules or donkeys to the coast—to Mazagan or Mogador—where they waited for a steamer. In bad weather the steamer could not call, for there was no harbour at either port, so the eggs would wait until the clouds rolled by and the wind ceased to blow. Then they would travel to London via the Canary Islands. On making inquiry of an expert I was assured that age could not wither nor lack of custom stale the infinite variety of their purposes. "There are confectioners," he said seriously, "who can make quite good cakes and pastry with any kind of egg."

What a pity it is that when Mr E. T. Brown goes lecturing there is not at least one Tom Barron in every county to hear what he has to say.

PRESTON, LANCASHIRE, *June.*



CHAPTER XVI

PRACTICAL FARM-TRAINING IN LANCASHIRE

ALTHOUGH Lancashire is primarily an industrial county it has a vast dairying industry, keeps nearly 80,000 acres down to oats, and takes agriculture very seriously indeed. Scorning Government grants, it has evolved and is supporting, without reference to Whitehall, a comprehensive scheme of training for the generation that is coming on. An experimental farm, equipped with a first-class modern dairy, an up-to-date poultry branch, a thriving horticultural department, and all the usual side-lines, may be found at Hutton, some three miles out of Preston, on the road to Liverpool. Here a system of intensive training has been developed in the shrewd practical fashion that one would associate with the county palatine.

A very considerable number of students take advantage of the courses, which are given at prices placing them within easy reach of every young seeker after knowledge. If the boy or girl of an agricultural labourer shows the necessary aptitude, and wants to take a course at Hutton, there is no charge for tuition, and the fees for board and lodging in the hostel are fixed at the nominal figure of £3 per term. Nor is this all. If the trainee has the right gifts, but lacks the means even to find so trifling a sum, and to pay the inevitable incidental expenses from which even the poorest student is not exempt, it is possible to get a paying job on the farm while in training, and receive 15s. a week for services rendered. In this fashion all expenses are covered.

For the Lancashire students whose means are less straitened board and lodging are a little more expensive, but still so trifling that no parent of even modest means would be troubled to find the necessary sums, while even those who come from over the border, and are consequently

not entitled to the privileges of true Lancastrians, pay no more than £15 a term for board, lodging and training. It should be noted in passing that the College receives women only in residence; the men are attached to the John Harris Institute in Preston and come out to the farm on certain days to gain practical knowledge.

So admirably is this County Council Training Farm conducted that there is a big demand for its women students; before they are out of their time applications for their services are in the hands of the Director.

On all sides training is a matter of practical experience blended with common sense. In the dairy, for example, you may find many kinds of cheese-making and many kinds of separating machines, because, as the very competent instructress will tell you, it is impossible to say what kind of equipment the student will have to handle when she goes out to a job, and she must be prepared to deal with all sorts. The same principle rules in the Poultry School, presided over by Mr C. W. Dobbin, the noted expert. He handles every type of incubator, although he has a very decided preference and knows the one that yields the best results; but he considers it is important for his students to be at home with any they may find installed on the plant committed to their charge when they go out into the world that looms so large beyond the training centres.

There are certain difficulties in running a poultry school for the benefit of pupils, because it is necessary, for teaching purposes, to hatch birds at the wrong season of the year, but in spite of all difficulties there is every suggestion that the Poultry School and Station, which covers eight acres, is a thoroughly profitable undertaking. Egg-laying competitions, arranged by the Lancashire Federation of Utility Poultry Societies, are carried out here, and students are prepared for the National Diploma.

The staff of the Horticultural Station, which, like the Poultry School, covers eight acres, supervises garden instruction in elementary schools and trains the teachers; the

staff lectures at various centres in the county on agriculture, horticulture and poultry-keeping. In addition to this work the members advise on all subjects, including cheese-making, and the School is open for inspection two days a week and on the first Saturday in every month, when agricultural societies and large parties of farmers can visit the place and receive information relating to their special problems. Sometimes the gatherings run into a hundred or more, clear evidence of widespread interest.

As stated, the children of farmers and farm-labourers pay nothing for tuition. Allowances are made to help all students who need assistance—for example, those who travel every day to and from work may receive a season ticket. Those who cannot live in the School, but reside in approved apartments in Preston, may receive a maintenance allowance. Any food producer requiring advice on agriculture, horticulture or poultry-keeping can get it free of charge, and, where necessary, personal interviews or visits are arranged. One of the important developments carried out at Hutton is a series of field experiments on the manuring of farm crops and the improvement of grass-lands. In return for hospitality, the instructor in cheese-making will visit any farm in Lancashire, without fee, and he will give instruction in making Lancashire cheeses and in curing bacon.

The men and women in charge of this great educational experiment in Lancashire are very keen, and take a pride in the response that the county has shown; it increases year by year. Those who were accustomed to look upon agricultural science with suspicion, or even dislike, are now finding the solution of some, if not all, of their problems. The result is that the Farm Institute has become the centre of attraction, and that while farmers are learning more and more to turn to it in cases of difficulty, their children look forward with real eagerness to the benefits of a course.

I have never seen so much enthusiasm in wet weather; it would be astonishing but for the fact that rain is the rule

LATTER-DAY RURAL ENGLAND

in this part of the country. In the autumn of 1894 the loss of a connexion on the way from Wales compelled me to spend two hours in Preston; the rain was terrific. Returning, after an interval of thirty years, I found that the downpour was unabated. *Verbum sap.*

PRESTON, LANCASHIRE, *June.*



CHAPTER XVII

POTATO DISEASES: THE NATION'S TESTING STATION

JUST outside Ormskirk, in another part of the county palatine, where rain is as certain as death and Quarter Day, you may find, not without difficulty, a small, old-fashioned farmhouse with five acres of the most poisonous land in England ranged round it. In the summer a notice-board proclaims the famous potato-testing ground of the Institute of Agricultural Botany, but in winter the wind plays havoc with notice-boards and they are removed. As in 1927, the previous winter—so far as Lancashire is concerned at least—had extended into July, the notice-board remained under shelter, and the visitor must needs inquire his way of various local authorities, the finer part of whose mental equipment has grown sodden by the rain. Happily all difficulties yield to persistent endeavour and the testing-ground can be discovered by those who will take no denial to their search. It is a curious patch this, famous throughout Great Britain by reason of its evil qualities; so intensely affected by the virus of wart disease that no variety of potato that is in the least degree susceptible can survive the test of growth on its black soil—a light loam on sand.

It is late in the day to say that wart disease is the most deadly of all the troubles that affect the potato, or that it has been found necessary to limit to the immediate district all production of susceptible varieties grown in any area proclaimed as diseased. Infected areas must not export their produce. The necessity for restriction has a curious origin. The well-known variety, King Edward, is susceptible, and unfortunately nothing has been found to take its place in popular favour. Those who carry on the fish-and-chip trade—a very profitable business—declare that no other tuber exists that is capable of yielding the chip that fried fish calls for, with a very minimum of fat absorption,

and as the trade is of enormous dimensions, King Edward reigns, in spite of all the efforts of the potato-growers to raise a variety that shall have its qualities without its susceptibility. Naturally every grower wishes to discover new varieties and to place them on the market; there is a vast fortune waiting for the man who can succeed in this endeavour; it is in order to be able to get a certificate to say a new variety is really new and immune that growers send tubers to Ormskirk.

The method is carefully regulated. A grower supplies thirty-five in the first year and pays a nominal fee of ten shillings. If they show themselves immune, and are declared by the Synonym Committee—to which reference will be made later—to be a genuine new variety, the applicant sends fifty fresh ones in the following year and pays no fee, and if the immunity persists for the second year, and the experts are still satisfied that this is not an old variety masquerading under a new name, the grower gets his certificate, and may proceed, if he is so disposed, to make his fortune. It is necessary to say that many are called by new names, and few are chosen as being worthy of the christening. After the certificate is given, one hundred tubers must be supplied in the third year for demonstration purposes.

Now, when a new variety has been certified by the Ministry of Agriculture as being immune from wart disease, it may compete for the Lord Derby Gold Medal trials. In July of the present year there were fifteen varieties entered for the coveted award, and each variety is planted in eight long narrow plots in various parts of the trial ground, so as to diminish the risk of any one being favoured by richer soil. In addition to this special planting, a larger plot of each variety is laid down to enable the seedsman who is concerned with commercial results to judge its behaviour under ordinary field conditions. It is understood that the Gold Medal is given for merit shown on the ground at Ormskirk; in other parts like conditions may not be achieved.

Side by side with these new varieties, certain established varieties—known as “controls”—are planted. This year they are Great Scot, Majestic, Kerr's Pink and Ally, and control-planting is done in order that competitors may see for themselves how their new varieties compare with the established ones, also, in order that the commercial grower can see what chance he has of competing if he takes a new variety in charge. Further trials are arranged at Ormskirk for early maturity and bulk, and these are carried out on a chequer-board system, the same manuring and cultivation being given to each. This is a new development.

Lord Derby's Gold Medal is the highest award in the world of potato-growers, and so eager are competitors that they do not complain of the fee of £5 that is payable for each entry. Men will send several varieties for these annual trials and will abide by the rather stringent rules. No new variety can be tested twice save by special permission. Fifty-six pounds of seed-size tubers must be sent in, carriage paid, by the 14th of March in any year. The resultant crops are not returned to the senders, and the produce of the trials is not allowed to leave the grounds. Ultimately all the potatoes are sent away for pig-feeding, after being mixed up, the farmer who receives the consignment giving a written statement that he will use it only for pig food.

The Gold Medal Committee and the National Institute of Agricultural Botany decide the result, and if varieties do not show sufficient merit no awards are made. Any entry may be refused by the Committee without reason being assigned.

Other work carried on at Ormskirk is the examination of virus diseases, and of the conditions under which the greatest advantage may be taken of the natural potentialities of the tuber. The old idea that varieties exhaust themselves and die of old age is no longer held; the general belief is that under careful treatment every established variety has a quality akin to immortality. But the abnormal and the diseased must be “rogued out,” and

this work is particularly difficult, because, when a potato plant develops virus disease, of whatever kind, it tends at first to produce those smaller tubers which are most eagerly sought after for seed. It follows that the most affected tubers tend to get planted, and in this way disease spreads. All manner of disease is cultivated at Ormskirk, cultivated deliberately, so that the potato that can pass unscathed through the testing ground may be fit to thrive on any field in any country.

One of the writer's objects in visiting Ormskirk was to emphasize the fact that there is much dishonesty in the potato trade, and that thousands of poor enthusiasts are victimized by synonyms—that is, by old varieties masquerading under fancy names. It is advisable to set down the definition of synonym as used in relation to potato varieties. "Two varieties are considered to be synonyms when all such morphological features as can be recognized by an experienced observer, as well as all such physiological characters as can be determined by ordinary observation and experience, are common to both; in fact, when the characters of haulm, flower and tuber, as well as maturity, resistance to disease, and particularly immunity or otherwise to wart disease, are the same in both."

The real sufferer from synonyms is no longer the farmer; the work of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany, following upon the leaflets of the Ministry of Agriculture and the unceasing efforts of its inspectors, has taught the farmers to buy elsewhere. The allotment-holder, the small gardener and the amateur who feels the passion for gardening stir in his veins when spring returns to the land, are the real sufferers. They are exploited every year, because the synonym-monger charges them a high price for giving a new name to an old variety, or even for giving a new name to several old varieties mixed together.

Those who visited the testing ground in the early summer (so called) of this year will have seen many of these pretenders growing side by side with their true selves, if this term be permissible. A peculiar fact in con-

nexion with these synonyms is that in some cases they vary from year to year. For instance, there is a synonym called "First Crop"; in 1925 it was "Sir John Llewellyn," a well-known and established variety; this year it is a different but an equally well-known sort. The popularity of "Up-to-Date" is maintained at Ormskirk; they show you "Factor," "Longkeeper," "Prosperity," "Sensation" and "Duchess of Cornwall"; every one of them "Up-to-date" and nothing else. "The Duke of York" has become "Dr Kitchen," "St Paul" and "Western Hero." "Sharp's Express" is disguised under the names of "Earliest of All," "Early Favourite," "Early Bird." "British Queen" is shown as "Royalty," "Irish Elegance," "Beauty of Essex," "Colleen." "Great Scot" appears as "Dreadnought," "Southampton Wonder." "Crusader" is seen as "Titan" and "Potfiller," and so on.

Altogether the writer saw thirty-six synonyms that have been proclaimed as such by the Committee. There were many others marked down as synonyms which had not yet received their final certificate of fraudulent pretence because they were still getting the benefit of a doubt that was so small as to be almost negligible. It should be stated that the facts set out here do not partake in any measure of the nature of special information. What he who writes saw at Ormskirk, you who read are able to see for yourselves in return for the pleasure of paying a visit to an institution conducted by men and women who devote sound knowledge and enthusiasm to the public service. Those who believe that the trade is maligned would do well to study the position on the spot.

There is no possibility that growers can plead ignorance. They know precisely what is happening at Ormskirk, they receive an annual invitation to attend the testing ground and see things for themselves; some of them come, and the truth of the case is put before them without any softening. But this particular form of trading is a paying one and will continue to pay for years to come, because there is always a new generation of amateur gardeners

arriving, and certainly the catalogues spread for their undoing are very pretty, and the illustrations are admirably reproduced. Stories about new varieties with extraordinary cropping power are cleverly told, and the game is a perfectly safe one at present because no penalties attach, and the Synonym Committee cannot pillory offenders publicly. Some of the largest advertisers in the trade are constant in their appeal to just the class of amateur that is unable to help itself, that parts with hard-earned money in good faith and buys something that is not a new variety at all, but an old and well-established variety, sometimes two or three mixed together. They would be purchasable at a much lower price if their proper and not their fancy names were assigned to them.

The scandal is blatant, naked and unashamed, nor can those who are associated with the trade plead ignorance. It is well known that the synonym traders did consider the question of proceeding against those who are endeavouring to give their game away, that certain of their representatives took counsel's opinion and were advised not to pursue their action. At a time like the present, when, in the world of food production, everybody preys upon the producer, it is a public duty to expose the tricks of the kind set out here. The Ministry of Agriculture and the National Institute of Agricultural Botany have done well to place the facts before the section of the public that will take sufficient interest in its own welfare to receive and ponder them.

Let it be remembered, to the credit of those concerned, that there are many seedsmen who refuse, in spite of all temptation, to have anything to do with these dishonest practices. They are out for profit like the rest of the world, but the money they earn must be earned honestly. Consequently their catalogues proclaim no high-sounding varieties that are not varieties at all and are merely created to mislead. Doubtless these straightforward folk suffer from the lack of startling and sensational invitations to the unwary, but what they lose in cash they make up in

credit, and, among those who know, they are respected. Such firms would be among the first to approve of the attempts that are made to clean and clear up this very considerable branch of their industry and to give the enthusiastic amateur, whose chief failing is credulity, a fair run for his money.

Synonymity is not limited to the potato; growers offer many other vegetable seeds bearing names to which they are not entitled. But the potato offers attractions that other vegetables do not enjoy. It is so easy to buy a good stock in a falling market, give it a high-sounding title, lie about it with all the glib phraseology of the showman, and pick the pocket of the small man who is enthusiastic but inarticulate.

ORMSKIRK, LANCS, *July*.



CHAPTER XVIII

INTERLUDE: THE PLOUGHMAN'S DREAM

THE ploughman came to the end of the field; the long straight furrow immediately behind him was the last that he would draw that day. Gulls and rooks that had followed the track of the share were clamorous in pursuit of their good work; they seemed in no way fettered by it. But both the ploughman and his horses had had enough. When he was leading his team along the level way to the off-hand farm I walked by his side. We talked of the life of landmen.

A sturdy, stocky figure, broad-chested, long-armed, with a rough grey beard that straggled over his face, and keen blue eyes, he was the typical ploughman of the remote countryside. I stayed with him while he groomed and fed his horses; we walked together to a point in the road where he turned up the lane to his cottage—a little shelter of weather boards and tiles, with a roof awry and a chimney that was obviously defective.

He has a wife, and four children all at school. He earns 32s. a week and pays half-a-crown for rent. The cottage he lives in has been condemned by the Sanitary Authorities, but as there is nothing to take its place he is allowed to live there still. The price of Council cottages, for which there is a keen demand by ex-Service pensioners, is 9s. 6d. a week. His four children sleep in one room—quite a small one, with a window that does not open; he and his wife have the other, which is not much larger. Downstairs are a living-room and a kitchen. In bad weather the rain comes through the roof, but fortunately they are able to keep the beds away from the place where the tiles “let wet.” The family tin bath is put there, and saves the water from going down through the ceiling into the living-room. The landlord refuses to do anything to the property, he says that all money spent on repairs is money wasted, and that if they are not satisfied they can go.

The ploughman has worked on one farm all his life, starting with rook-scaring more than half-a-century ago. During the War he received as much as 46s. a week; now his statutory wage is 30s.; but he earns an extra 2s. for an overtime job, which consists in cleaning and oiling the gas-engine that chaffs the straw, cuts the roots, and renders kindred services in the great tithe barn that dates from the time of Elizabeth.

He has no fault to find with his employer. "A decent sort of a man to my thinkin'," he describes him, "and so was his father before him." He has but one grievance, he can get no land. "If the master would give me just half as much as he wastes round his two big fields," he said, "I'd have what would keep myself."

I asked him if he would continue to work on a farm, given, say, an acre of land, and he shook his head. He told me that if he had the money to buy a couple of pigs "to fat" and a couple of skeps of bees, a few chickens, some rabbits, and a couple of goats for milk, he would not need to work for any man. He could grow sufficient food for himself and his family, and sell enough to pay landlord, bootmaker and grocer. I questioned this, asking him for details, and found that he had all the knowledge a smallholder requires, both theoretical and practical; he even knew how to handle goats so as to keep them in health and get a maximum of milk. He wound up with a curious and significant statement.

"I am only one," he said, "but I have known scores in my time that could do just what I want to do, if they got the chance. Some of them tried; two or three got smallholdings, but the land was too dear, and they made the mistake of growing to sell instead of growing to feed themselves first, which is what I'd do if I got the chance."

"But the real trouble is that farmers won't give us a mite of land if they can help it. They'll pay an extra shilling or two if so be they must, but they would rather let the land go down to grass by itself, than hand an acre of it to one of us. They know that when folk saw what could be

done with an acre, they would come asking awkward questions. Time my father was worn out and they was going to take him to the workhouse—that's nearly thirty year ago—he said to me: 'George, if I'd had a bit of land of my own, I'd have kept on. Get a bit of land, George, if ever you have the chance.' Then they took him away and he died, and I've been trying ever since, but it doesn't come, so I must go on, best I can."

There was no real complaint here; there was no attempt to provoke sympathy. His was a dull, unimpassioned statement of facts, that doubtless could be multiplied in every county of England; facts that penetrate to the heart of labouring men when, in the long nights of winter, they huddle over a little fire of logs after a scanty meal, and with no prospect before them but a heavy day of labour on the sodden fields.



CHAPTER XIX

STAFFORDSHIRE AND ITS PROBLEMS

IN the south we do not hear much about Staffordshire; perhaps we may say just now that the agricultural area that makes no history is happy. But the reason why we hear so little about that county which stands fourth on the list of milk producers in England, and holds within its boundaries more than 100,000 cows, is that most of its markets lie around it. Manchester, Birmingham, and the Five Towns which Mr Arnold Bennett has invested with so much interest, consume the bulk of Staffordshire's supplies; it is only where and when the county has to depend upon the Metropolis that it finds trouble. For example, on one farm the writer visited the present price obtained for Grade A milk, bottled in the dairy, is 1s. 7d. per gallon; during last winter it was 1s. 1 1/2d., the result being a profit on production. But in the north-east part of the county, where the United Dairies handle the milk, the price during the winter months for ordinary milk taken to London was no more than 9 1/2d. net. There are eight big milk-buying firms in Manchester, but the reaction of one combination on another makes it hard for the people who cannot hold out to get a living. Happily for the dairy farmer there is a great demand for Grade A milk in Wolverhampton, Walsall, Staffordshire, and a few other places, though, oddly enough, the Five Towns won't look at it. The reason may perhaps be found from an examination of the map, where they are seen lying in a long line, one after the other. On either side of them are small farmers who produce and sell milk that, whether it is or is not clean, is sufficiently popular to serve all purposes.

There are curious results of low prices in the trade. Some farmers are keeping their milk at home and raising calves and pigs; they find this better than selling at the low figure offered. On the other hand some of the churns are fetched so late in the day by the Combine that cows

are not milked until eight or nine o'clock in the morning—and something of the normal energy goes out of the farm where these conditions obtain. There are two big condensing factories in Staffordshire which dispose of summer surplus. As many as 500 people are at work in one on the borders of Derbyshire, but it is purely a seasonal trade. The fashion in which organization is defective is shown by the fact that some milk is brought to Wolverhampton from Dumfries, while other milk passes through Staffordshire on its way from Somerset to Newcastle-on-Tyne. It is fairly obvious that, if this transport is really necessary, Dumfries should be supplying Newcastle and Somerset Wolverhampton. But the whole of the method of handling produce appears to lack combination and co-ordination, with unfortunate results to the farmers.

Next to milk on the scale of production come potatoes, and the good growers are prosperous. The demand is very largely for King Edward—the variety at which the Ministry of Agriculture looks askance because, as I have explained in a recent chapter, it is susceptible to the dreaded wart disease. But the people who deal in fish-and-chips—and their name in Black Country and Five Towns is legion—will not be denied. King Edward fries well in response to the least possible expenditure in fat and becomes comparatively crisp with a minimum of absorption. The argument that can shake this hard fact has yet to be advanced. I heard of one man in Black Country who chips 10 tons of King Edward potatoes a week for his multiple shops, and buys them all from Staffordshire. Happily for the trade, Kerr's Pink—which is an immune variety—is getting into the county, and even putting up a challenge to the universal favourite. In view of the national reluctance to make changes, many years must elapse before the challenge can be felt.

The latest hope of the county is, of course, sugar-beet. A new factory will be ready to take the roots that are lifted in the autumn, and I hear of as much as 120 acres being down to beet on a single farm. It is claimed that one

grower at Litchfield is bracketed with another grower in Norfolk as the biggest producer, in point of sugar content, in this country.

Smallholdings being very abundant in Staffordshire it is perhaps unlikely that there will be a great extension of beet cultivation. I am told that there are 10,000 holdings of over 1 acre and only 5000 over 5 acres in the county, while really big farms are scarce. Men with two or three cows and a few pigs and poultry contrive to make a living on a comparatively small acreage, because of the urban markets that are all round them. The Pottery towns and Black Country generally maintain an unceasing demand. This enables small men to hold their own, but they are, of course, up against many difficulties, which are largely the result of their refusal to combine. Then, again, many of the larger farmers who are losing money seem quite unaware of the period of transition through which the farm is passing. One expert expressed the opinion that the men who are suffering most in Staffordshire are those who produce goods that are not wanted and who cannot see their way to change their obsolete methods.

The impression one gets from Staffordshire is that there is an ample market for produce, and that good farmers can just pay their way. If the problem of co-operative marketing were handled in a vigorous fashion there would be a greater profit for the producer, with no additional cost to the consumer.

Doubtless if conditions get worse the impetus towards this collective handling will grow. The facts of the agricultural situation in the county are best revealed at the Agricultural Institute at Rodbaston, near Penkridge, where every side of the farmer's business is followed along the most modern lines, and in spite of the disabilities associated with a student's college where teaching claims departure from the ordinary practice of husbandry, the Institute is conducted at a profit. The holding comprises 315 acres, and is proving extraordinarily useful to farmers in the county. Among the work that is being carried on is

the production of baby-beef, and the Director hopes to put steers on the market weighing 7 cwt. at less than eighteen months. For sheep they cross the Kerry Hill with the Shropshire and have a certain number of Leicester Cheviots brought straight from Scotland.

They are making experiment with sugar-beet at Rodbaston and have set themselves the high aim of getting fifteen tons to the acre. On the experimental farm, cows are milked three times a day. Where this practice is followed the cowmen get £3, 10s. a week, but they work 100 hours or more and are paid by the hour, the rate being 7½d. up to 54 hours and 9d. afterwards. This is rather better than the Wages Board figure, which is 8d., and the normal wage of farm-hands in the county is 33s. It is worthy of note that the poultry expert attached to the Penkridge Institute is Mr Thompson, who is said to be the most remarkable plucker and dresser of poultry in England, and he started life by getting a farthing a bird when plucking in Leadenhall Market.

At the Institute many important experiments have been carried out with iodine in connexion with pig-feeding, and it has been shown that by giving pigs half-an-ounce of mineral mixture per day, with a 5 per cent. constituent of iodine, there is a far greater fecundity among the sows, and the litters are stronger and more healthy. Before this iodine treatment started the Institute suffered from heavy mortality among its farrows. The experimental farm specializes in Grade A milk, which is bottled on the spot, and actually accounted for the profit made in 1926.

The wheat grown, if not sold for seed, is kept till the following July, when the price is highest, but the Institute employs a man to keep rats at bay and consequently no heavy loss is due to the ravages of vermin.

A Farm Institute is full of interest to the agriculturist who has never studied the workings on the spot; he is often puzzled to know how it is possible to get good results when those who are seeking them are hampered by the claims of many pupils. If you are to teach, you must

often do the right thing at the wrong time for purposes of demonstration: where there is any occasion to decide between the claims of the farm and those of the pupils, the latter must take precedence.

Rodbaston is certainly a very fortunate specimen of its kind, consisting as it does of a mansion-house with a farm attached, midway between Stafford and Wolverhampton, in a district that supplies areas round the Black Country and the Cannock Chase coalfields. The County Education Committee purchased the house and farm in 1919 for the benefit of all who seek to make a living on the land, and not only does Rodbaston provide technical and practical training for young men and women, but it is the headquarters of the County Advisory Staff.

Twenty-five students are received, and the house has all modern improvements, such as electric light and central heating; while the farm-land is used for demonstration it is not regarded as an experimental holding but as one with a commercial end in view. The production of Grade A milk, the maintenance of a herd of pedigree large white pigs, of Shire horses and of a flying flock of sheep—all these activities are to be found here, and the farmery is fully equipped with modern machinery, so that students can be taught how to use all manner of implements and machines.

There is an orchard of old trees, with an apiary and a considerable range of glass-houses, in which grapes, tomatoes, cucumbers and the rest are grown for market. There is one nursery for the raising of young trees and another for market-garden crops, while the pleasure-grounds are fortunate in the possession of exceptionally fine coniferous trees, planted in the days when the place was part of a private estate. The Poultry Station covers four acres, and about a thousand chickens are reared annually, both by artificial and natural methods, all birds being trap-nested during their first season. From the apiary, surplus stocks are sold to bee-keepers in the county.

The year's work is in two sessions, the longer one, of twenty-two weeks—from October to March—being

reserved for lads between the ages of sixteen and twenty, while the second, from April to July (eleven weeks), is conducted for women students above the age of sixteen. The winter course is one of general farming practice, with a certain amount of science thrown in; the summer course is devoted chiefly to dairying and poultry management. The fees are remarkably low. For those who belong to the county the tuition and maintenance for the six months of the winter cost just £30; for the outsider the price is £50. For the eleven weeks of summer the total cost to the girls resident in Staffordshire is £12.

When we turn to the syllabus of the winter course it is possible to get some idea of how the young farmer is trained. On the practical side he has to take part in all seasonable operations on the land; to visit markets, stock farms and cattle shows; to milk, make butter and various kinds of cheeses; to understand the mechanical analysis of the soil and test artificial manures and feeding-stuffs. He must also be able to carry out simple botanical experiments, learning something about the insect pests of farm crops and their control, and the comparative anatomy and general physiological processes of farm animals. He must be able to carry out land-surveying jobs, keep proper accounts, do a little farriery work and rough carpentry, and grasp the general principles of mechanics and the handling of farm machinery and implements. Work in the departments of horticulture, poultry-keeping and bee-keeping is just as thorough, while the girls who enter for the summer course must master dairying work in all its branches, including the chemical side, and know at least as much as the men, and probably more, of horticulture, market-gardening and the practical side of poultry-keeping and apiculture. It will be seen that Staffordshire is preparing the rising generation for its work on the land and giving it an equipment for which its forbears may well have sighed in vain.

PENKRIDGE, STAFFS, *July*.

CHAPTER XX

A RUN THROUGH SHROPSHIRE

THE condition of agriculture in Shropshire is not quite so bad as it is painted, though much money is being lost on arable farming and on long-term stock-raising. I had not been in the county long before, in conversation with a practical agriculturist, I was told of a gentleman who had been complaining to the Press about the losses he incurred by farming. "If he says he has had losses," remarked my informant, who spoke as a friend and neighbour, "I suppose we may take his word for it, but I can tell you that he has two or three thriving farms on which everything looks prosperous. He lives extremely well, and if another good farm were to come into the market to-morrow at a times price, I am certain he would be a buyer."

This is true of many men. They call out because of their losses, but they say nothing about their profits, and while they will tell you much about the sides of farming that do not pay, they will have very little to reveal about the branches that do. Shropshire is a very large county, covering nearly a million acres, of which rather more than half is permanent grass, and rather less than a quarter of a million is arable. It carries a large head of live stock, and there are many famous breeders within its boundary. In the north, round Whitchurch and on the Cheshire borders, where dairying is the chief industry, there are considerable herds of dairy Shorthorns and a big business in cheese. Whitchurch, Market Drayton and Oswestry are the centres of the cheese market, but the prices have not been good of late and profits are small. In the central part of the county, where cattle and sheep are fattened, farmers have reason to complain, but here, too, we find that the really up-to-date men are holding their own. Those who are following in the footsteps of their grandfathers or great-grandfathers are being hard hit. If somebody would tell them that

agriculture is passing through a time of change and crisis, and that they must look to the present rather than to the past, it might help. The County Authorities are doing their best.

Sugar-beet is arousing interest even so far away from East Anglia as Shropshire, and a factory is being erected between Wellington and Shrewsbury, which is to come into working order in the autumn and is to handle 4000 tons of beet. There is every prospect that this acreage will be very considerably increased, because at the Harper Adams College, which is the Central Advisory Station not only for Shropshire but for Warwickshire and Staffordshire as well, I was shown a four-acre patch in the centre of a field where sugar-beet is being grown in eighty different plots, under varying conditions, in an endeavour to find out the most suitable methods. The real problems of increased bulk and higher sugar content are fully realized by the expert in charge, and it may be that in Shropshire, as in so many other counties of England, beet is coming to help the general farmer in years when growing conditions are reasonably good.

If the cheese market has grounds for complaint, the men who raise milk are in a worse plight. Many of them consign to London and get starvation prices. Taking the agriculturists of this county as a class, their trouble is that they are unable to agree to hold their own and they allow themselves to be disposed of according to the will of the man who buys their produce. It is obvious to everybody who has ever kept a dairy cow that no milk can be produced at the prices paid, even in the early summer on good grass, and if we examine the farmer's position more closely we find that he is not his own master in any department of his work, and that, while much is being done to educate him, a great State policy, that would be associated with practical supervision of his interests, is what he really needs. I am convinced that, if he could see any benefit in control, he would not resist it.

Many of the farmers with whom I have talked in this county deplore the suggestion that agriculture is in a

ruinous condition. They point out that the best men keep their end up, and even make a little profit in certain directions, and that if they received a fair proportion of the price paid for their produce they could live in comfort. Only the old-fashioned men who will not adapt themselves to the changing times must remain, to a very large extent, beyond the reach of help. Here and there I raised the question of co-operation, and the temperature fell several degrees.

It is impossible to pass through Shropshire without finding ample evidence of the assistance that agriculture is receiving from the Harper Adams College, and the men in charge there say that the increase of applications for assistance and advice is most satisfactory—40 per cent. in 1926. The fact is that many who find the position increasingly difficult are looking about for new means of meeting it; but so far as I can ascertain they have yet to take the co-operative idea seriously. At the same time, those who are closest to their problems, and are striving to discover a way out, are convinced that the farmer's one road to safety lies by way of education and co-operation, and that the State can best assist by giving him fair play. Serious folk do not look for Protection or subsidies; they know better. Dr Crowther, who has charge of the Harper Adams College, is a realist, less concerned with what the farmer asks for than with what he is likely to get. His influence, and that of his young men, who are developing work along several novel lines, is proving helpful to the three counties within his administrative area. He points out that, while agriculture dates from the dawn of civilization, it has not yet lived a century as a science; and he adds the significant remark that in times of crisis the average industrialist contrives to carry on and hold out, much better than the average farmer.

SHREWSBURY, *July*.



CHAPTER XXI

HARPER ADAMS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

OWING to the difficulty of arranging various appointments in the West Country, I was reluctantly compelled to give up an intended visit to the institute over which Dr Mercer presides at Reaseheath, in Cheshire, and the first institute south of Hutton that I was able to visit was the Harper Adams Agricultural College, in Shropshire. Of Dr Crowther's capacity to envisage the situation I have dealt elsewhere; I would like to say something about the work that is being done by his staff, because it appears to be extensive in scope, practical in character and full of promise for the agriculturists in Shropshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire.

The College itself receives between sixty and seventy students, and trains them with the aid of an endowment, a grant from the Ministry of Agriculture and some public funds. While its chief function is to train students, it also carries on experimental work for the benefit of the area that has been handed over to its charge, and contrives to test out important new methods from time to time.

In the department of Chemistry much attention is given to the nature of soils and to the value of feeding-stuffs. There is an Analytical Department for the benefit of farmers—all fertilizers can be analysed and all material that the farmer buys tested, in order to establish the precise relationship between the advertised and the real values. It may be doubted whether full advantage is taken of this opportunity. Many farmers are in the hands of the merchants and dealers, and those who need long credits cannot afford to be too critical. It follows that merchants can take a certain number of risks and reduce these very considerably by various devices with which the College authorities appear to be perfectly familiar.

One of the most ambitious pieces of work in hand at Harper Adams is a survey of the soil in Shropshire.

Classification should be of immediate practical use to farmers because, with all the available information before them, they will be able to take a fairly reliable view of the possibilities of successful enterprise on a given area. Knowledge of the soil and practical management go hand in hand. A soil survey of the county has been taken before, but it is claimed for this one that it will be of greater worth to farmers than its predecessor.

Some mention has been made of the value of sugar-beet to Shropshire and of the experimental plots to be found on the College ground, but it is instructive to learn that the origin of this work was a conference of farmers with the heads of the College, convened to inquire into the best means of meeting the sugar-beet position. All methods discussed at the conference are being tried on the College grounds, while certain of the Shropshire farmers are carrying out special trials along lines in which they are particularly concerned. The purpose of the inquiry is to test the cost of cultivation, together with the possibilities of production per acre and of sugar content per ton. The eighty plots include every combination and arrangement that can suggest itself to the practical agriculturist: some beets are grown on the ridge while others are grown on the flat; some are grown on land that has been subsoiled, and others on land that has been left alone. All reasonable distances between rows and between plants are to be found here, and if sugar-beet is successful in Shropshire, as there is every reason to believe it will be, there is no doubt that this success will be largely due to the pains all concerned have taken to find the best means of production.

One of the teachers at the Harper Adams College told me that in his opinion there is an enormous difference between the pre-War agricultural attitude towards education and the post-War attitude. For a long time the typical working farmer either knew nothing about Harper Adams College or regarded it with suspicion. To-day he looks to it for help, and does not look in vain.

It is interesting to note that, at this College, experiments

are being carried out with the soya bean. This perhaps is the most remarkable of all leguminous plants. I remember just before the War being invited to go over a factory in London where the soya bean was prepared for the London market in the varied forms of milk, cheese and bread. The milk was extremely palatable, the bread excellent, the cheese quite satisfactory, and one of the qualities of the milk was that the most ingenious handler of produce could not rob it of the cream, because, although what might be called the equivalent to the butter-fat content was greater than it is in pure milk, there was no tendency for the cream to come apart; the fat globules remained distributed, and it was beyond the power of separator to alter their native disposition. The War put an end to the supply of soya beans, and some people doubt whether our climate is suitable to their growth, but if we could grow the soya, and it could be handled effectively, there is no doubt that a food supply of the very greatest value would be added to the national assets. There can be no tubercle germ in the product of the soya bean, and its flavour is equal to that of Jersey or Alderney milk.

The ordinary production of the county is suffering very greatly from combines, but the farmers of both Shropshire and Warwickshire are producing clean milk and often the Grade A or pasteurized variety. The question of sour milk is occupying the attention of the dairy section of the College; they tell me that the national loss due to souring in the course of a year amounts to £2,000,000.

One of the troubles of the county is that the lime is disappearing from the light soils and leaving sour ground. In the old days it was customary to put from 20 to 30 tons of lime on an acre, but this practice is no longer carried out—the cost is too great—though they say that there is sufficient lime in the county to replenish the soil. Much of the ground lime that is sold to the farmers is not reliable, and there is abundant need for analysis. The College is preparing a map showing the areas of lime deficiency throughout the county.

HARPER ADAMS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

On the costings side the College is doing good work to help the farmers. It has records of average expenditures on a typical farm, and has started a book-keeping course by correspondence for farmers in Warwickshire. The response has been so considerable that the course will be extended to Staffordshire and Shropshire in the autumn of this year. In the opinion of the College authorities, much of the farmer's trouble is due to his unbalanced expenditure and the fact that in many cases he is not in a position to decide for himself whether a crop has resulted in a profit or a loss. Only when figures leave no possibility of doubt does he know where he stands. The course of book-keeping is expected to do much to guide and regulate his acts of husbandry.

It may be noted that the National Poultry Institute has its headquarters at Harper Adams and that poultry-rearing is taught very thoroughly. The plant to be seen is considerable, the lecture-rooms are excellent. Willard Thompson, the American Director, who was in charge until quite recently, was often heard to declare that this form of production is the biggest thing of its kind in the world, and those who have just come from Lancashire will not be disposed to contest this opinion.

The men in charge of the teaching at Harper Adams College appear without exception to be enthusiasts, and to be quite sure that their special branch of the work is the one that is of first importance to agriculture. Teaching in this spirit is bound to be effective.

NEWPORT, SHROPSHIRE, *July*.



INTERLUDE

SQUEEZING THE DAIRY FARMER

NO careful student of agricultural conditions can travel through England to-day without developing a considerable measure of sympathy for the dairy farmer. He has been urged to produce pure milk, and has done so; he has been advised to increase his herd, to employ a good bull and to model his dairy practice on approved lines. In thousands of cases, tens of thousands perhaps, he has followed the advice, and to-day we have more cows in England than ever before; but it is quite an uncommon experience to meet the farmer whose dairy is shown by a balance-sheet to be a paying proposition. Many of them just contrive to make ends meet; others admit a balance on the wrong side, but say that they find it cheaper to keep cows to tread the straw than to feed bullocks, since the losses on fattening stock are so heavy, owing either to the buying rings that infest the market, or to their own inability to satisfy market needs.

Yet all the time that the dairy farmer is meeting problems as best he may, the milk he produces is selling at a high price to the consumer, and the real trouble comes from the fact that the farmer can get no more than a very small part of what his milk is worth. He is in the hands of combines—like the United Dairies—that are able to dictate prices, and the extent to which this dictation goes is revealed by a contract before me as I write. It shows that during the two months of early summer the farmer has been receiving $6\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon for milk that is retailed at 2s. a gallon, and that when the consumer is asked to pay at least 2s. 9d. this farmer will be getting no more than $10\frac{1}{4}$ d. Moreover, if we look at the back of this contract, on which certain terms and conditions are set out, we find that the company reserves the right to refuse to take supplies for a certain number of days without assigning any cause, that it can suspend deliveries at will in the event of a strike, and that

if, for any reason, the vender cannot supply the minimum he has contracted for, he pays a penalty. In practice, if he supplies more than his contract, a still further reduction is made in his price. He is bound hand and foot. This contract is not an exceptional one.

Now the fact of the matter is that, even in the flush season, milk cannot be produced at $6\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gallon. Cows are not cheap in a year like the one we are passing through—a certain amount of concentrated food has been necessary all through the early summer months owing to the lack of grass; wages on the dairy farm are comparatively high and there are all manner of overhead charges. It is a fairly obvious fact that, under existing conditions, the farmer is not working for the benefit of the consumer but for the benefit of the middleman, and that profits that belong to him of right are being intercepted and added to the legitimate cost of distribution.

No industry can thrive if it is surrendered to groups of business men bent upon extracting so much that the producer cannot face the ordinary mischances of his calling, and it is not too much to say that the exploitation of the dairy farmer for the benefit of a few combines is doing infinite harm to agricultural England. The farmer himself cannot find the way out, he needs a lead. This, one fears, he will not get from the Government, which, by shelving the Linlithgow Committee Reports, has deliberately turned aside from the road that leads to reform.

As a leading authority on agricultural questions said to the writer the other day, the trouble about farming is that the farmer's produce becomes valuable only when it has left his premises. This comment applies very directly to milk. The agriculturist must not hope for protection, in the ordinary sense, or for subsidies, or for that safeguarding of his industry for which his less discriminating friends clamour; but he has a right to the real form of protection that his industry requires, and that is, protection from exploiters and those who conduct their business with a minimum of risk and a maximum of profit. Farmers who

will consider the contract I have mentioned, and realize that it is only one of hundreds that are given in the remote parts of England where their co-workers are inarticulate, will understand the need for change and know that none can come to the rural areas until there has been a very significant alteration in the farmer's outlook. He must realize that he has power in his own hands, if he will but learn to use it. Properly organized, he could dictate to the combines; for lack of organization he must submit to dictation. He buys or, in some parts of the country, rents the cows, feeds and tends them, establishes conditions that are held to safeguard the public on whose behalf the cows are milked. The middleman then appears, saying in effect: "I will take your milk from you at a low price and sell it to your clients at a great profit, so that I can pay big dividends on a large capital and increases the area of my control year by year. You shall have just as much and no more as may enable you, if you have energy and capacity, to continue to fill our churns. Protest, and you will find that you haven't a churn on the place."

The farmer complains, but he obeys. If he would but unite his forces, and insist upon a fair price, what could the Combines do? The Swiss milk producer gets 75 per cent. of the consumer's payment, the English producer from 25 to 35 per cent., with a few exceptions.

In the Near East, in my travel days, I have joined a company of travellers going to a certain place because small bodies of thieves would not attack a caravan, and large bodies were more or less kept in check by authority. The single farmer goes in great danger, if not of his life, at least of his profits. The trouble is that he won't join the caravan, he will travel alone. Such a contract as is referred to here shows the inevitable result.



CHAPTER XXII

A NOTE FROM DERBYSHIRE

THERE is much milk production in this beautiful county, and although producers, considered collectively, are getting considerably more than is paid for milk in the west, many of them are certainly in trouble. The county producers may be divided into three classes :

1. Those who sell to local retailers. These are undoubtedly the best off. There is less cost for transport, and, owing to the facts that there is only one intermediary and the consumer pays a price that everybody knows, the producer is in a position to ask and to receive a better figure.

2. Those who send their milk on rail to London, Manchester, Sheffield and other great cities ; they receive the prices fixed by the National Farmers Union in consultation with the middlemen, and although, since farmers will not co-operate, it is not a good one, men are able to struggle on.

3. Those whose milk is delivered to factories or is collected by the factory owners for manufacturing purposes. The prices paid in these cases are so low that men work on the poverty-line. The best figures obtainable in the county are just under 1s. per gallon during the summer and just under 1s. 4d. during the winter, so in the most favourable circumstances the producer cannot hope to get quite 50 per cent. of the price the consumer pays. But very few of those who send their milk away on rail approach the 50 per cent., while those whose milk is carried to the factories will get any price they can be squeezed into accepting, no matter how low. I asked one of the greatest experts of the county to name the price that would give the capable farmer a fair chance, while leaving an ample margin for those who stand between him and the housewife ; his figure was, I thought, an extremely

modest one. "If the farmer could get 1s. 1d. for the summer milk and 1s. 4d. for the winter, he would do quite well."

"It is important," he went on, "to remember that milk production must be ruled in some measure by milk consumption, so that it is well that milk consumption should be increased to the greatest possible extent, because unless the demand for milk increases it is impossible that farmers, who are relying so much upon their dairy herds, should continue to hold their own." Here he touched upon a real trouble. If the industry were united, all surplus milk would find its way to factories, and the profits would go to those who produce the raw material. As things are, the more the farmer relies on his dairy herd the more dependent he is upon those who have an intelligence out of all proportion to their conscience.

Another trouble that they find in Derbyshire is that nobody asks for Grade A milk. There are plenty of dairy farmers ready to supply it in return for an extra penny per gallon, but apparently the demand is very limited. The general public is not aware yet of the advantages that attach to milk that is absolutely above suspicion, their interest is very languid, and farmers are discouraged. The county has lately been running a clean-milk competition, for which there were seventy entries. Many of the competitors were producing milk of certified bacterial standard, but they were unable to sell it as such, and could not command any higher price than their next-door neighbour whose milk is not produced under like conditions. It is a pity, when we remember the impetus that has been given of late years to increased-milk and better-class production, too, that we should find the public quite unresponsive. Apparently the campaign for increased-milk consumption that was to revolutionize our methods has not realized expectations.

I asked for the typical balance-sheet of a good dairy farmer with an average holding in the county, and was given the following:

A NOTE FROM DERBYSHIRE

FARM OF 100 ACRES—50 PASTURE, 30 MOWN, 20 ARABLE;
20 COWS, AVERAGING 700 GALLONS; 20 OTHER CATTLE;
3 HORSES

<i>Outgoings</i>				<i>Returns</i>			
	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Rent at 35/- per acre	175	0	0	Milk, 7000 gal. at	773	0	0
Rates	25	0	0	11½d			
Concentrated foods .	250	0	0	7000 gal. at 1/3½d.	126	0	0
Seeds and plants .	20	0	0	Fat cows, 7 at £18			
Threshing	15	0	0	Calves sold, 8 at £2	16	0	0
Repairs, shoeing, etc.	15	0	0	Corn sold, 5 acres at	50	0	0
Artificial manures .	25	0	0	£10			
New cows, 3 at £25	75	0	0				
Depreciation on im- plements, renewals	20	0	0				
Carriage on milk, 1400 gal. at 1d. .	59	0	0				
Incidentals	11	0	0				
Balance for labour and living expenses .	275	0	0				
	<u>£965</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		<u>£965</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

It will be seen that on this farm of 100 acres the farmer is represented as getting the highest price for his milk—that is to say, 11½d. for the summer, 1s. 3½d. for the winter. It will also be seen that the net result under these favourable conditions is a return for his labour and that of his family of just about 15s. a day, after paying rent and rates, but if he employs one man in the dairy at 5s. 6d. a day he has under 10s. daily on which to live and support a wife and family. Yet nobody in the county can get a better price for milk. It may be that a man and a boy will be needed for the work, in which case there is a further reduction of probably £40 a year on the balance, leaving him little more than £130 a year; from this must be deducted anything less than the top price that he may receive for his milk, and there are plenty of farms in Derbyshire where less than 1s. is paid for the winter milk, and the summer milk is round about 8d.

It follows that on farms of this kind the worker is forced to economize in every possible way and, since he cannot feed his family properly, it is not surprising that he does not feed his land, and that its productivity enters upon an era of steady diminution. It is fairly obvious that there will be a crisis in milk production ere long, unless some of the real brains of the Combines realize in time that a dead goose can lay no golden eggs.

July.



CHAPTER XXIII

FARMING IN HEREFORDSHIRE

IN spite of all manner of difficulties, in spite of a certain tendency on the part of grass-land farmers to get some sort of living out of part of their holding while allowing the rest to fall into ruin, there is no doubt that the Herefordshire agriculturist is alive and alert. One finds many pessimistic farmers, but they do at least realize some of the causes of their trouble, and this is a step in the right direction.

The farming in this county is very mixed. You find arable cultivation, sheep- and beef-rearing, milk production, small fruit, hops, sugar-beet and a considerable trade in pedigree cattle. Hop-growers are in a certain difficulty, because much of the money for their 1925 and 1926 crops is still outstanding, owing to the reduced consumption of beer, which in its turn is due in part to high taxation and in part to industrial troubles. When the working man lacks the money for his pint, the hop-grower speedily becomes aware of what is happening. This year the hops are suffering from both mildew and blight, and the growers want certain forms of mildew made notifiable. At the same time this trouble is not perhaps an unmixed evil; one or two growers have told me that if the crop of 1927 is not a very good one it will at least enable arrears to be paid off.

Farmers show great interest in sugar-beet; the new factory at Wellington, near Shrewsbury, is going to take the roots grown in the northern part of the county, while the rest will go to Kidderminster, where the factory lately declared a dividend of 14 per cent. and carried over a large sum of money. In the south of Hereford some men are growing 12 tons to the acre, with as much as 20 per cent. sugar content.

Farmers in Herefordshire appear in many cases to be dealing with their work on scientific lines; the Milk Recording Society of the Hereford cattle averages nearly

800 gallons, and they are feeding an ever-increasing and carefully calculated ration, as the grass-values decline with the season. Farmers are interested in intensive grass-land cultivation, but apparently are not disposed to be the victims of monopolists if they can help it. As one big farmer said to the writer: "I cannot regard sulphate of ammonia and nitrate of lime as the only manure for intensive grass-land cultivation, because, if this were so, we should get into the hands of monopolists. I am going to try the Chilean nitrates out; if they serve we shall at least know that we have two strings to our bow." In all departments the men I met seemed to be masters of their business; they left me with the feeling that agriculture in this county is progressive.

The Hereford Shorthorn cross is the favourite, but a 1000-gallon cow is hard to find, because the Hereford breeders have been far more concerned with beef than with milk, and the development of the dairy side of Hereford cattle is being carried on more in Wiltshire than in the county of origin.

Farmers complain, and with reason, about the free import of skimmed milk into this country. Several of them are quite reasonable in their criticisms. They say: "If the food had any value we could not complain of entry, seeing that the practice of the country is to permit free imports for the sake of the urban population, but this skimmed condensed milk is worthless. It must do real harm to the children to whom it is so often fed, and it enables the Combines that control our milk supply to pay a knock-out price for the farmer's surplus. Needless to say that what they give has nothing to do with what they charge, so the public gets no benefit and only suffers damage from this particular free import." Here, one feels, the milk industry of England has the right to be safeguarded, not for the sake of the producer but of the consumer.

One of the interesting developments in this county is baby-beef, for which the Hereford bull should be very

useful. The work of raising young steers is being taken seriously. The demands of the market are realized, and some farmers say that they will soon be able to produce beef in eighteen months without too much trouble. The Hereford cattle are, of course, a great source of profit to the county, very large prices being paid by the Argentine for bulls, and although the county has not been troubled with Foot-and-Mouth Disease—chiefly, perhaps, because it does not import cattle and consequently escapes infection from this source—it has been hard hit by the embargo on export. Whenever there are outbreaks in this country the foreign ports are closed to our cattle and the breeder never knows quite where he stands; at any moment he may find his plans upset. At the same time there is no way out of this difficulty, and consequently there are no serious complaints. Some breeders believe that by careful selection they could improve the quality of veal calves very much in the development of the Hereford Shorthorn cross. Many of the calves that are born on Herefordshire dairy farms, as elsewhere, are worth nothing save as sausage-meat, because the question of a suitable sire has received no consideration at all. The use of the Hereford bull with the Shorthorn cow should not only improve the veal calves but should help the baby-beef trade.

Flockmasters have many different breeds of sheep here, Kerries, Cluns, Rylands, Shropshire and, in the south of the county, Oxford Downs, which are folded on turnips. The Ryland tup and Cheviot ewes yield a very good type of mutton, which fetches its price in the markets of South Wales and Birmingham. In spite of the depression in the meat trade, sheep farmers carry on. Outside the area of their farms small cultivation would appear to be the rule of the county, and the tendency to turn arable into grass is apparently on the decline, a hopeful fact. It is well to remember, however, that the natural pastures of Herefordshire are rich. It is a poor pasture that will not produce 2 gallons and maintenance in early summer, and many do much better.

Fruit-growing—an important industry in the county—is under a cloud just now. The state of the apple orchards is not very healthy; they suffered from the frost at blossoming time and so, too, did the cherries and the plums. Small fruit was a patchy crop, good here and there. Frost manifests itself in curious fashion. In some years it takes the highlands, in others only lowlands suffer. In the spring of 1927 the highlands escaped, and it was round about the river levels that fruit suffered most.

Labour receives a fair wage—stockmen get 36s. a week, while the general labourer gets 31s., plus overtime. The farmers I have spoken to do not complain of the price they must pay but they have a grievance because they cannot afford to increase it; consequently the best man and the worst take the same money, with the result that the worst man has no inclination to be more efficient, and the best man is discouraged. Speaking generally, one comes to the conclusion that much money has been lost in agriculture in the last five years and that with few exceptions men have suffered, but the condition is not desperate; a bumper harvest or two, coupled with fair prices, would bring about a wonderful change, because of the competence of the rank and file.

Before leaving Herefordshire mention should be made of the educational work there. The county does not run an institute, but does a great deal of teaching work and has day classes for farmers three days a week—from ten to one and two to four. There are further classes for butter- and cheese-making, Cheddar and Caerphilly being the popular varieties. Hedging and pruning are taught, and while the young men who propose to take up farming are not charged for tuition, butter-making classes for women are held for a nominal fee. There is a certain amount of book-keeping and veterinary instruction too, and it is clear that these classes arouse interest and are carrying out valuable work. It is one of the most hopeful signs in agricultural England to-day that education is coming into its own and that the men who farm by rule of thumb and could not give a

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reason for anything they did are being gradually superseded by a generation that has received the elements, at least, of scientific training. The response to the farm classes provides further testimony to the serious fashion in which the Herefordshire farmer faces his problem. All save the backwoodsmen want to know the best and latest methods.

HEREFORD, *July*.



CHAPTER XXIV

A COTSWOLD FRUIT FARM

FOR the man with brains, energy and capital, it is sometimes possible to turn even poor agricultural land to useful purposes, and nowhere has the writer seen this truth more strikingly set out than on Bredon Hill on the Worcester-Gloucestershire borders, where some 130 acres that, considered from the standpoint of general farming, are quite poor because they carry at most five inches of soil on limestone and more often three, have been turned into a thriving fruit farm. As a purely agricultural proposition, the resources of this area would be badly strained to give employment to three workers, even at the low agricultural wage current; under fruit it employs forty men, women and boys permanently, together with the available population of two villages in picking time.

For the proper conduct of this considerable undertaking, in which many thousands of pounds must be invested, a very definite effort has been made to take advantage of the latest research of the experts at places like Long Ashton and East Malling, where the Ministry has its fruit and research stations; in addition, the practice of the leading commercial growers is followed attentively. The old problems of the fruit-grower are met, and as new ones arise they are either solved on the spot or referred to those who are making a special study of them, the management being ready to respond to every development. There are many departures of great interest. For example, I was surprised to see that the apple-trees had not had their inside growth removed and, not having had a summer pruning, that growth seemed very dense. The explanation was that the trees are allowed to shape themselves to some extent by the effect on the branches of the weight of their own fruit. Experiment has shown that, here at least, if the shape of a mature tree is sought too early, the tendency of branches is to sprawl.

The water difficulty has been met at considerable expense, but very effectively. Apart from a complete supply that covers the entire area, there is an underground central spraying plant, with portable steel mains connected by flexible rubbers to the stopcocks; it is possible to spray at a 250 lb. pressure to the square inch. A central spraying plant with a mile of piping costs about £600, but pays for itself quite handsomely, because so soon as trouble develops in any orchard the plant can be brought into action, and the trouble controlled in the shortest time. When the pipes are not wanted for spraying they can be used for watering, and when the engine is not busy in the orchard it serves to saw wood. Horses draw it from one to another of a series of concrete platforms with a standardized cover. The significance of this development—which has proved its worth in the space of a couple of years—is, that it puts a period to destructive outbreaks of insect pest or disease. If invaders can be conquered by spraying, they cannot obtain a footing, and as the orchards are inspected regularly, and the first signs of a bad condition can be recognized at once, it is possible to keep trees and bushes clean.

Apart from outbreaks calling for special effort, there are no less than four sprayings in the season—one of them colloidal. The January winter wash for the standards is of tar distillate. When the trees are about to blossom—that is to say, in the pink stage of the bud—lime sulphur is employed in a 7 per cent. solution. A wash of colloidal sulphur and soap is given to Cox's Orange Pippin, the one apple that, when it will do its best, can make the fortune of the grower.

One of the facts proved on this fruit farm is that the trees thrive and crop early in the absence of tap roots. The limestone, though it will not admit this deep growth, appears to hold moisture, certainly the roots that spread laterally receive the necessary nourishment. Shelter belts—chiefly of conifers—are grown for protection from the cold wet winds, which are often more harmful than frost; this

year, while frost spoilt the trees in the valleys it did not climb the hill. In Hereford and Worcestershire growers had the same experience.

The system of cropping is to grow bush-fruit fillers between the rows of apples, pears and plums. There is a certain amount of market-gardening and a small acreage is given to strawberries (all the ground for these purposes is dressed with nitrate of soda and nitrate of potash). The special effort on this farm is to grow the best and nothing but the best, and the most profitable markets are served, including some of London's leading hotels. Everything is graded and properly packed, care being taken to exclude all damaged or speckled fruit; and when in the season of picking some of the trees cannot be reached in time, straw is put under the choice varieties so that nothing that falls is bruised, while the fruit hangs long enough to get the maximum colour.

The men on the land earn standard wages, which are low in Gloucestershire—about 30s. a week. They get no harvest, but there is piece-work, and a special price is paid for pruning. Men who spray get an extra shilling a week for wear and tear. The real advantage comes to them and theirs when picking begins. It starts with the bush fruit in early summer, goes on into the autumn, and demands, for the soft-fruit season, all available service. The work is monotonous but the money earned is very good; a single worker can take as much as 45s. in a week of long hours, and the mothers with two or three capable children have frequently earned £5 by pay day. Last year the picking bill amounted to upwards of £500; this year it will be nearer £750, and, as the industry grows, it may be necessary to bring in labour from other districts. Apart from growing for the consumer, there is big business done with certain canneries; it is interesting to note that for black-currants, red-currants, raspberries, gooseberries and plums the canner has a ready market in America, where the leading orchardists have nothing except their crops of raspberries and logan-

berries that can rival our products. English bush fruit is emphatically the best.

Fruit-farming cannot be a poor man's job, since, to get a living, the small grower should have 10 acres planted and up to another 40 acres for expansion; the labour bill on 10 acres may be £300 a year, the outgoings about £400. The cost of planting 10 acres on a place with suitable buildings, though it would vary according to the variety and the closeness of the cropping, might amount to £2000, allowing for top fruit with fillers underneath—that is to say, lines of apples, plums and pears, the proper distance apart (30 feet), and red-currants or gooseberries between. Against this expense there comes the advantage that two-thirds of a good crop will enable the grower to carry on comfortably, and a really good year should leave him with a handsome profit.

The troubles of fruit-farming, as seen through this place, where difficulties exist merely to be overcome, are largely concerned with transport and salesmanship. For example, to send fruit from Cheltenham to Glasgow costs as much as to send fruit from Cheltenham to South Africa. The foreigner, who gets his transport cheaply, pays less for labour and lives frugally, contrives to glut the jam market with surplus fruit that, often over-ripe, or even rotten, is put down in sulphur dioxide to prevent decay, the sulphur coming off in boiling when the jam is being made. Why cannot the public be notified when they buy jam that has been prepared from fruit preserved in this fashion?

Where the middleman is concerned all orchardists complain. They are reticent here, but on the journey through the West I heard strange stories. For example, I was told that some scores of pots (40 lbs.) of peas sent from some market-gardens to Birmingham had obtained a payment *ex gratia* of 1s. per pot. The cost of picking them was 1s. 2d. a pot; but the worst of the story is that the consignment went to the incinerator to keep up prices, and the man-in-the-street who wished to buy peas had to pay 3d. per lb. Cabbages were fetching 3d. per dozen in

the market when they were worth 3d. per piece in the shops, plums sent to a West of England market yielded a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb., while the price in the shops was 8d. Some commission salesmen, who are also shopkeepers, buy fruit at a very low price through a dummy, and then take it over for their own shops. In France and elsewhere this practice is illegal; here it is permitted. On red-currants the return has been as low as $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb. in 1927, although $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per lb. is paid for picking alone; out of the balance must come the price of chip baskets, carriage and salesman's commission. So the grower is hard hit, while the consumer pays 6d. or more for his fruit in the shops.

I made careful inquiry at the farm to discover the proper price of fruit, if the grower received a fair price, the middleman a reasonable commission, and the retailer kept sufficient stock to make an ample profit out of large sales.

The figures given were as follows:—

Cooking apples, $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 3d.; dessert, 3d. to 6d.
 Gooseberries, 3d. (early ones, 6d., falling to $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. as season advances).
 Red-currants starting at 6d., dropping to 4d.
 Raspberries, 6d. to 10d.
 Black-currants, $8\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 10d. (Less this year.)
 Strawberries, 7d. to 9d., or 1s. for good dessert.
 Cooking pears, 3d. per lb.; good eating pears, 6d. per lb.
 Cabbages never more than 2d. per piece.
 Peas, 2d. to 3d. per lb. in a high-price season.
 Big cauliflowers, 3d.

At present both fruit-grower and market-gardener are handicapped heavily by an abominable system that seeks to make sufficient return on small quantities in place of distribution in bulk. On a considerable fruit farm like this, where outlay, so long as it is reasonably remunerative, can always be met, it is possible to keep going by constant study of the market and by the production of the very best. But no efforts can save the occasional slaughter of

A COTSWOLD FRUIT FARM

first-class produce in order that middleman and retailer may live and thrive on a very small return. This is the danger that must be faced on a fruit farm that goes far to maintain two villages in security and yields some of the finest produce on the market.

TEWKESBURY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, *July*.



CHAPTER XXV

SMALLHOLDING IN SOME WESTERN COUNTIES

FEW people outside the western counties realize how smallholding has developed in Somersetshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The first-named county has no less than 22,000 acres let in smallholdings and they bring in a gross rental of £58,000 per annum. This rent is paid half-yearly, and at Lady Day only 4 per cent. of the money was in arrears. In Wiltshire, where many of the smallholders are ex-Service men, we find between 15,000 and 16,000 acres, with a rent-roll of £33,000 a year, and here, too, the arrears are not more than 4 per cent. The smallholding settlement in Gloucestershire is on a more modest scale, less than 2000 acres, but much of the land on the Cotswolds, as on the Mendips, is bad, and needs a really extraordinary amount of hard work to yield a living in return. For example, at Charterhouse, on the Mendips, land cannot command more than 7s. 6d. per acre, but men are fighting their problems on it, and coming out on top.

In the three counties named above, there are over 3000 smallholders; taking them as a class they are making good, and even enjoying the struggle. The secret is not hard to find; they are striving for themselves, and if the land yields a profit it is their own. In many cases their families work with them and there is a great community of interest, although there is no tendency to co-operate. In order to show how strongly and how wrongly individualism persists a single instance may be cited. In one district of cottage-holdings four men occupying four adjacent cottages are working on holdings that do not aggregate 20 acres. Each one has cows and there is a churn to take to the station, some miles away, in the morning and the evening. When the families settled there was some suggestion of co-operation, but the wives of the smallholders promptly proceeded to quarrel, and to-day each

smallholder has his pony and trap and gives up the necessary time to make the morning and evening journey with a single churn. The four meet twice daily at the station.

The difficulties of these western smallholders have not been light. Last year they found it extremely hard to sell their produce because of the Coal Strike. Those of their clients who had money to pay had not the coal with which to cook it. South Wales, which gives them a big market for their live stock, was unable to buy the usual quantities while the Strike lasted, and is not buying to the normal extent even now. Milk is the mainstay of these smallholders. Ninety per cent. of the Somersetshire men are engaged in its production, and in spite of the bad prices, and the hard work, a considerable number of them leave smallholdings for larger farms. But the prices paid by the Combines are so small that the men who must submit to them, and those of their family who help them, live in a condition of semi-slavery; certainly if they were not their own masters they would not persist. The idea that production decreases when a farm is broken up into smallholdings has been definitely disproved in Somersetshire and Wiltshire, where the production of milk has shown an increase in these circumstances, and there are of course a few hopeful instances of co-operation which help all concerned. Unfortunately they must be regarded as exceptional.

Another side to the smallholding question is a purely social one. I was talking in the West with a gentleman who has had a great experience in dealing with smallholders, and has been called upon from time to time to consider applications. He told me he had met men whose letters had been couched in most noxious terms and whose attitude was altogether truculent and offensive. These same people, after two or three years of hard work on the land, had completely changed their outlook. Some who had boasted of being Communists, or Bolsheviks, had abandoned all association with the necessary tenets of revolt, and were on the side of social stability. They had added agricultural stability as well, because once a smallholder is settled he

sticks to his job, and there is less change on these holdings than there is on larger farms. It is interesting to learn that, in Somerset, milking classes are part of the ordinary school curriculum in the villages: children between the ages of twelve and fourteen are taught to milk. Wiltshire is beginning to follow the example of her neighbour in this regard.

On the smallholdings the dairy Shorthorn is the popular cow, but west of a line drawn from Taunton to the south you get the Red Devon cattle. Curiously enough, there is very little pig-keeping, and it would be well if interest in this industry could have been revived among the smallholders, but they have been so badly hit in the past by the fluctuation in prices that they have failed to get any advantage from the rise due to the embargo on imported pork. Many of the smallholders are taking a very serious interest in the development of their grass-land and in various systems of intensive cultivation that are now under discussion. A few of them are experimenting with sugar-beet. This is chiefly in Somerset. Beet is not grown largely in Wiltshire yet, the trouble down to the present being one of transport; it has been necessary hitherto to send the roots to the Eastern Counties. Now a factory is to be built at Petherton, near Bridgwater, in Somerset, which will not only help the county but will encourage Wiltshire and Gloucestershire to develop their sugar areas.

Undoubtedly our smallholders deserve a certain measure of assistance, though it may be admitted that the claims they urge are too modest to excite opposition. What they need first is protection against those who seek to plunder them, and then the old, old story of co-operation must be told again. At present they are quite unable to grasp the essential truths, and they have some definite and unfortunate belief that in consenting to co-operate they sacrifice independence. It is their legitimate pride to stand alone, but undoubtedly some of those who are unable to do so could have carried on successfully had they joined their fortunes to those of others.

Speaking to one of the leading authorities on agriculture

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in the West, he did not hesitate to declare that the small holdings are the most promising feature in the present situation. "The big farmers," he said, "are hard up, and can hardly carry on much longer on the old lines. Their expenses are high, they live well, they refuse to combine against those who exploit them, and, while many of them do no more than make both ends meet, a considerable proportion are actually losing money. The smallholder, on the other hand, carries on with a very minimum of expense. He and his family, or part of it, work for their living, live very frugally, have no position to keep up and very little interest in amusements. Their one concern is for land, stock and crops. When such men succeed, and are able to pass from a smallholding to a large one, they bring with them the tradition of hard work, and they hold out where men accustomed to a softer life go under."

This, of course, is not true of England alone, it is a common experience on the Continent. The greatest outcry in the West comes from men who cannot adapt themselves to changing circumstances, who believe that farming practice is immutable, and that if the old systems will not serve there is nothing to be done.

The extent to which farming conditions have changed was revealed strikingly by a farmer in the West who showed me his weekly wage-books for July 1927 and for July 1897. Thirty years ago 13 men did the work of his farm, and earned £8, 16s.; to-day 20 men are at work on the same acreage, and the wages bill is £40, 4s. It is hardly necessary to stress the significance of these figures.

MARLBOROUGH, WILTSHIRE, *July*.



CHAPTER XXVI

THE OPTIMISM OF CORNWALL

NONE who know the agricultural conditions in Cornwall to-day, or have realized how recent developments have alarmed and disturbed the agriculturist within its borders, would find it easy to account for the progressive spirit that animates the county. There can be no doubt but that the large farmers of the eastern side are losing money, that big men and small alike are groaning under the burden of rates that rise steadily, and wages which, even though little more than adequate to the workers' needs, are not met by the returns. On the west side the market-gardeners, those men so long held fortunate, who win two crops from the land every year by dint of intensive cultivation, are faced with a crisis. They find an ever-increasing flow of imported produce of the kind they can raise best—broccoli, tomatoes, asparagus, grapes and soft fruit. Their expenses are heavy, they pay high rents and are lavish in the use of artificial manures. They have thriven through many years by reason of the comparative absence of frost and the long months of sunshine, but to-day they are suffering such a French invasion as threatens their prospects, and where France does not chastise them with whips the Dominions overseas chastise them with scorpions.

Signs of the times are to be found in the offices of the County Council whose smallholding tenants produce a great deal of vegetables and fruit, and are now applying for a reduction of their rent. It is well to remember, of course, that rents in Cornwall are high, that smallholding in the West is the rule rather than the exception, that forty acres is considered quite a lot of land, and that in the more favourable parts rent is known to reach a double figure per acre.

Market-gardening flourishes round Penzance and the Tamar Valley on warm lands, where first-crop potatoes are

lifted in May, and broccoli succeeds, and is ready during the first winter months. Men work very hard in these parts, husbands and wives and children all contributing to the effort that maintains the home, and, although the big fruit is strangely neglected here—orchards, generally speaking, being in a very poor and neglected condition—everything else seems to receive an ample measure of care; the amount of work carried out on the land compares very favourably with what is accomplished on the larger farms in other counties. Every Cornishman who has land in cultivation seems determined to make it yield the last ounce.

Sugar-beet is coming to the aid of the arable farmer, and it is not surprising to find that the sugar content is well above the average, because there is much suitable soil, with plenty of warm rain and ample opportunity for growth.

When we consider the agricultural outlook there are many aspects that must not be overlooked, though at first sight their bearing on agriculture may not be apparent. As has been stated repeatedly in these pages, the country is passing through a period of transition. It will emerge from that period in due course, having found a new road to prosperity as it has done so often in the past, and the question will then arise, how far is any particular county ready to take advantage of the change? In some parts of England we have seen the passing of the descendants of long lines of farmers. In Essex, for example, the county I know best, there were comparatively few native farmers left after a great slump that started in the late eighties of last century. They were replaced by men from Scotland, from Yorkshire, from Devon and from Cornwall. In Cornwall, on the other hand, one is quite sure that, though there may be casualties during this season of change, the county will never be invaded from the north or the east. When conditions right themselves, Cornishmen will be found carrying on as of old.

The reason is not far to seek. On the educational side Cornwall is in the van of progress. North, south, east and

west one finds evidence of this and, partly because the county accepts the Burnham scale, there are good applicants for all school posts advertised. Agricultural education has always been of an advanced character in Cornwall, the first county in England to receive a grant for experimental work. In dairying it holds a leading position, as the prize-lists of the London Dairy Show testify. I am told that the Royal Household contains more dairymaids from Cornwall than from any other county. Where horticulture is concerned great work has been done. The County Council's staff has been strengthened very recently and a second experimental station has been established. Cornwall has a complete network of secondary schools, and it is said that, with the exception of those in the moorland area, no child has more than five miles to travel to reach one. Work of this kind, silent, steady and yet remunerative through the years, has a great effect upon the outlook and there are no signs in the county of a rural exodus.

There is another great force at work to make village life attractive and hold workers to the land, and that is the Women's Institute. In Cornwall these institutes are federated under the direction of that most energetic worker for Cornish causes, Ingeborg, Lady Molesworth St Aubyn. There are sixty-six institutes in the county, and they have upwards of 5000 members. You find them in villages with a membership of twenty or thirty, and the great centre is in Truro, which is the largest in all England. Non-sectarian, non-political, they unite women of all classes in educational, social and philanthropic work to promote the welfare and happiness of the community. They have shown their use in the presence of women on Boards of Guardians, in better care of Poor Law children and old people, in the establishment of District Nurses, in the promotion of humane slaughter of animals for food, in horticultural shows, in the development of handicrafts, in the teaching of gardening and cookery. The result is that there are no "dead" villages in Cornwall to-day, but you do

hear of places that were "dead," in which nothing ever happened until the Women's Institute was established. It has united Church and Chapel and has created a spirit of content that is quite uncommon in England to-day.

Dairying is an important industry; there are 60,000 cows in milk, and many sheep are kept, the latest figures showing upwards of 300,000 head. The importance of smallholdings is shown by the return of 6000 holdings of less than 20 acres. There are many rural industries in Cornwall—pottery, basket and toy making, glass-working and charcoal-burning.

It may be said truly that if agricultural conditions are difficult in Cornwall, if men and women must work very hard and accept a very scanty return for their labour, they are facing evil times with rare courage, and are well equipped for taking advantage of more favourable seasons when they come. There are many villages within fifty miles of London where there is less social life and less friendly intercourse than are to be found in remote corners of Cornwall, which look at first sight as though they had been singled out as an abiding-place for the Spirit of Isolation.

I asked Mr Hawk, who was for a long time Chairman of the Cornwall County Council, and is now engaged in writing a book on thirty years of agricultural experiment in the West of England, what he thought agriculture needed most. He replied, as so many others have done, that he thought better prices, lessened costs of production, together with reduced cost of transport and marketing, are essential. He added a more significant suggestion, to the effect that such charges as education, highways, public health and police should be borne by the Imperial Exchequer. It is the burden of rates that weighs most heavily upon the Cornish farmer; he cannot see that the services on which they are based should be associated with land, in face of the terrific competition that its produce must sustain.

September.

CHAPTER XXVII

FARMING IN WARWICKSHIRE

THE state of agriculture in Warwickshire reflects conditions obtaining throughout England, because there is all manner of soil within its boundaries, and nearly every aspect of husbandry receives attention. To the north-east of Birmingham there is a heavy wheat belt with poor pastures; south of that we find the cattle and sheep country, and below that a lighter land, on which barley and sheep are raised. Then come the pastures immediately south of Warwick, and the ordinary arable land, with its usual rotation round Stratford-on-Avon and Kineton, while down in the south, towards Northamptonshire and Gloucestershire, are sour, heavy clays, together with some decent grass. There is an adequate dairying industry for the service of the towns, quite apart from the dairying for sale outside the county.

In country so varied as this, and with two great industrial centres like Birmingham and Coventry, thriving and redeemed from the depression that affects the heavy industries of the north, money can be made; the only point is whether it is made by the people who work or by those who exploit them. So far as one can see, the really clever farmer makes money to-day in many parts of Warwickshire, in spite of depression and bad markets, but he is the type of worker who would prosper in any undertaking, whether in town or country. It is no uncommon thing to find in the centres of depression men who hunt three days a week from the time when cubbing comes to an end down to the time when the vixens run free. There is also a certain amount of shooting to be had. There are a good many markets that the motor-car has rendered easy of access, so that some at least of the men who are unable to make two ends meet are not justified in blaming either agriculture or the Government. They are asking for such a life of leisure as agriculture can seldom grant its followers,

and never grants for long. Then, again, it is a fact that the standard of living which was created during the War has never been lowered, and there are those who judge the results of their work by that new standard, from which their fathers and grandfathers would have shrunk.

Unfortunately there is much old-fashioned farming in Warwickshire. For example, round Rugby, within easy distance of the great fattening pastures of Leicester and Northamptonshire, there is plenty of thirty-month to three-year-old beef, which the market does not require and for which it refuses to pay a profit to the grazier. Everybody should know by now that you cannot fatten bullocks and sell them as three-year-olds and increase your bank balance. Dr Ruston of Leeds attributes three-quarters of the farmer's losses to the feeding side of his business, and it is unfortunate that the county, as a whole, has not taken up baby-beef.

There is much dairying for export in South Warwickshire. Round by Barton-on-the-Heath and Moreton-on-the-Marsh dairymen send their milk to London; about Warwick the farms supply local needs; more northern milk producers feed Birmingham and Coventry. The Dairy Shorthorn is popular; there are some very good herds, and it is satisfactory to note that the Ministry's scheme for premium bulls receives support; bull calves are born fit for something better than sausage-meat. In the north of the county one hears a good bit about Jöhne's disease, that mysterious wasting trouble that attacks cows and goats, and seems at present to be beyond the reach of cure. There is of course grave danger here, because many men who find a cow with signs of incipient trouble are safe to send it to the nearest market, where it may be bought to add to a herd, and so spread infection. The veterinary surgeons to whom I have spoken take the trouble very seriously, admitting that they are baffled by it.

Grade A and certified milk are being produced on a small scale, the demand coming chiefly from the towns, where education has taught the advantages of pure food;

on the big dairies it is quite a common experience to find milking machines. Those who use them are well satisfied, those who do not are exceedingly sceptical.

Warwickshire does not discriminate in the matter of flocks, whether they be permanent or flying; farmers would appear to take what comes to hand. All manner of rams are used, and breeds tend to become badly mixed; but taken altogether, the flockmasters of the county appear to have kept the demands of the market in view, and the mutton they are raising is small and not too fat. In the southern part of the county, flocks are sometimes run on enclosed fields that were probably under the plough some years ago, and have been seeded down owing to bad times.

The two chief pigs of these parts are the Tamworth and the Gloucester Old Spot. Tamworth, of course, lies on the extreme edge of the county, on the Staffordshire border, so it may be that loyalty makes this particularly ugly pig attractive to the Warwickshire farmer. Gloucester meets Warwickshire in the Atherstone country and round Moreton-on-the-Marsh, while the Avon travels into it by way of Evesham, so that the association goes far to explain the choice. Animals that you do not meet very often are the long-horned cattle which still persist on a few Warwickshire farms.

Poultry production is disappointing, particularly to those who have gone through Lancashire and seen how men can get 25 per cent. on their outlay plus their labour, and increase to as much as 33 per cent. in a few years, when they have actually delegated the hard work to a well-paid staff. With the big industrial centres of Birmingham, and places of popular resort, poultry farms ought to be developed on a considerable scale, and I believe that the County Council is making some effort to that end. There is no doubt that Birmingham, Coventry and Rugby, to say nothing of places like Stratford-on-Avon and Leamington Spa, could absorb very large county-grown supplies.

Wheat production is lessening, there is so much three- and four-horse land. Nowadays it is practically impossible

to run wheat at a profit on very heavy clay unless the season is an extremely favourable one. The bad heavy soils of the south and south-east do not help the wheat-grower. Cultivation of sugar-beet is in its infancy, but there will be a fairly considerable crop for Kidderminster this year. Doubtless production is on the increase. A trouble in Warwickshire would appear to be a large number of backwoodsmen who never hear of last year's progress until the year after next.

Market-gardening is becoming popular, and although many growers appear to fight shy of Birmingham markets—not altogether without reason—they do quite well at Coventry. Round Snitterfield, in the south, farmers are adding market-gardening to their ordinary work, and making it pay. The influence of Evesham is felt in the south-west, where the smallholders gather round Salford Priors and Bradford-on-Avon. There is a very definite increase in the area under raspberries and black-currants, but although the smallholder works very hard he is not always able to carry on unaided. Round Kineton and Tysoe it is no uncommon thing to find men who are taking some part-time job in order to enable them to keep their smallholding together. The difficulty is less with the man who has a handful of acres than with the man who has from twenty to forty. The larger holding demands all his effort, and if he is forced to take odd jobs, with the little ready money they bring in, his land is likely to suffer.

Many of the market-gardening smallholders have been in the habit of keeping a motor-van, but to-day there are buyers who come round and purchase their produce on the spot, while hinting, directly or indirectly, that it is a pity for the smallholder to go to the expense of transport. If the market-gardener falls into this trap he will be much in the same position as the men who sold their churns merely because one of the milk Combines was ready to supply them. Without their churns they were helpless, and were forced either to take whatever prices were offered or undertake an outlay which is by no means inconsiderable.

Labour is not too plentiful in the county: young men tend to go off to the works of the factories, and to take a chance that agriculture cannot afford them. The position is made still more difficult by a very grave shortage of cottages. Nobody is anxious to build them at current rates for a rent that may not exceed 3s. per week.

Speaking generally, Warwickshire is depressed on its agricultural side, and a bad summer will increase difficulties. It has become a dairying county in the past few years, and has no more than 50,000 acres down to corn to-day. There is no incentive to farm intensively, and many farmers have been hit hard. But the fact that men are not living in the fashion of their fathers must be held to account for a part of the distress.

STRATFORD-ON-AVON, *July*.



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MIDDLE WEST

AFTER leaving Shropshire and Staffordshire behind, and passing through the great fruit-growing centres of Hereford and Worcester and the heavy claylands of Warwickshire, certain very definite facts emerge. Agriculture is not holding its own in these counties, the truth is revealed even to those who make only a passing study of externals. The general standard is going down. Hedges are no longer receiving the regular handling they need in order to fulfil their purpose, ditches and drains are neglected, purchases of artificial manures are declining, men on the small farms are suffering very definitely from lack of capital, which has been reduced by persistent losses since 1922. To-day on many holdings they farm for "Friday night," as we used to say in Essex, and their need is the measure of the opportunity of those who exploit them. They are unable to hold out for a fair price for what they have to sell, and the middlemen are fattening upon the poor remains of their capital.

The farmer is not altogether free from blame. For example, the Ministry's scheme for the provision of premium bulls receives little support and on many a farm any animal that can beget a calf is considered good enough. This is a very serious matter, because in the Irish Free State to-day the registration of bulls is compulsory, and the worthless animal has no better prospect in life than to become beef. It follows that many of the store cattle coming over from Ireland to-day are actually better in quality, less rough, coarse and bony than much that is available for rearing in these western counties. The quarrels between the meat-packers in America have reacted on this district rather badly. For example, the price of fat lambs has fallen by over 40 per cent. in a year—fallen, of course, to the producer, never to the consumer, the butcher will see to that.

One farmer was telling the writer that he sold a number of fat lambs in a certain market for 39s. a-piece and was charged 17s. for one leg by the butcher who bought them. The trouble is that the housewife does not want fat meat or gargantuan joints and the farmer is trying, quite vainly, to force them on her.

The milk position in parts of Staffordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire is very bad. I have referred to contracts under which the farmer was receiving 6½d. a gallon for his early summer milk, but a company, known as the Midland County Dairies, is operating from Birmingham and Wolverhampton and, despite evidence to the contrary, is said to have led United Dairies to raise its prices. The milk position calls for a measure of investigation on behalf of the Government. The profits taken by the middlemen are a real danger to the industry; for, in addition to the ordinary margin between the price of purchase and the price of resale, it is common knowledge that the big buyers take the cream from the milk by means of the separator and return just so much as the law requires.

Smallholding in the West of England is hampered by the opposition of county authorities. Under the new Act they have to contribute out of the rates 25 per cent. of the annual losses, and so they are putting every obstacle in the way of applicants. The Act should have had a compulsory clause; the omission is a serious one.

In addition to County Council opposition, the N.F.U. is opposed to smallholdings, and although it cannot be regarded as a body that carries any great weight in the country, it undoubtedly possesses a certain power for obstruction that has been used repeatedly in the last few years.

To give one example in connexion with what has just been said, the N.F.U. is opposed to the compulsory registration of bulls, though this registration is necessary if the rank and file of our cattle are to realize anything better than knock-out prices.

Where estates fall into the market there is a tendency for farmers or landowners to absorb smallholdings, and it is extremely difficult for those who are well qualified to conduct one, and are willing to submit to the endless hard work that it involves, to obtain the land they need.

In Staffordshire, Shropshire and Warwickshire the smallholders are concerned chiefly with dairy work, in Hereford they are stock-keepers, and in Worcester, market-gardeners. Unfortunately the smallholder with a dairy uses any bull he can come across, and his stock suffers.

The smallholder is not having an easy time, though it is safe to add that he does not look for one. I have been told in certain quarters that he tends of late to get behind with his rent, but this apparently is true only in isolated instances; in the West the great bulk of them are quite solvent. It is important to add that some of the rents paid by smallholders are very high indeed—50s. per acre is not an uncommon thing in Shropshire, even though the markets are bad and many of the men on large farms are said to be living on the money they made down to 1920. Smallholders would do better if marketing conditions could be improved, but there are markets in the West in which it is certain that the seller will be fleeced. One of the most expert land agents in the West named two markets in which it is almost impossible for the producer to get a price that will repay his outlay. "You will find one solitary buyer making his voice heard," he remarked; "the rest are his friends, who wait until the sale is over, when they hold another auction among themselves with the stock that has been bought at bargain prices."

Many men are in the hands of the dealers, and in some cases of the auctioneers. They get into debt and then receive a notification that they must send so much stock into the market without any delay. This is an order they cannot disregard: their stock is sacrificed to the ring, and the temporary relief resulting leaves them really worse off.

The market-gardeners of Worcestershire are suffering badly from the middleman. I am told, on what should be sound authority, that fruit and vegetables are being deliberately destroyed in the Midlands in order that prices may be maintained, and the whole trend of the shopkeeping class here, as elsewhere, is to sell small quantities at high prices rather than to make fresh produce available to people of modest means and to accept a moderate profit. An example was given to me on the day when I was making close inquiries in Worcester itself. Peas by the pot of 40 lbs. had realized 1s. 6d. per pot in Birmingham market—the price in the shops to the housewife was 4d. per lb. Such instances could be multiplied *ad nauseam*.

From careful inquiries, made over the whole of the country visited, it seems clear that fruit, fish, vegetables are sent to the incinerator if there is any glut, in order that the consumer may be forced to pay a high price. That the scandal should have assumed its present dimensions without interference by the authorities is indeed remarkable, because on the one hand we have this destruction of nourishing food, and on the other we have the increasing consumption of things out of tins that are a danger to the health of the community. Yet in the Midland markets it is no uncommon thing to hear wholesale dealers boasting about the money they have made, while the grower finds it is very hard to live, even by dint of work on a scale from which the middleman would shrink, though many are agreed that his case would be fairly met by hard labour.

In the western counties there would appear to be very many farmers who are suffering from the effects of depression and the rumours of disaster. They lack the will or the energy, or both, to combine for their own protection. United, they could dictate terms to the middleman; divided, he dictates terms to them. Here, as elsewhere, one feels that the root of the trouble in farmland is the big margin between the price that the producer receives and the price that the consumer pays. The great gap between

THE MIDDLE WEST

the two is filled by the middleman, and until the farmers will deal with him their plight is hopeless. It may be that they need the assistance of the State to do this, but even the State is powerless to help those who will not help themselves.

WORCESTER, *July*.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE OUTLOOK IN OXFORD

IN Oxfordshire the signs of agricultural depression are clearly visible to those who are looking for them. The whole of the area won for the plough during the War has been lost, and much other land has gone down to grass, though, so far as one can tell, most of it has been seeded down. The tillage area declines steadily, and barley remains the outstanding corn crop on the brashy lands. The importance of sheep to the Oxford farmer, and the consequent attention to roots, make barley-growing more or less a necessity. Sheep are increasing though the methods of keeping them change. Penning is not so popular as it was, and flockmasters are endeavouring to meet market needs by getting the smaller joint that matures early. It is interesting to learn that sheep fed in Oxfordshire are actually being purchased by one or more of the chilled-meat companies.

Although many of the backwoodsmen of the farming community are still fattening bullocks to sell at three years old, and looking to make a profit out of the consequent loss, there is a general inclination to give baby-beef a trial, and at some of the winter Fat Stock Shows run in connexion with the Midland Marts, the Co-operative Society of Banbury owned by farmers, there are baby-beef classes. This development is noted with great satisfaction by those who are endeavouring to help the farmers of the county to turn their opportunities to the best possible account. Farmers ran their own bacon factory at Kidlington; it had shops at Oxford, Banbury, Kidlington and Leamington—perhaps elsewhere, but these were the places mentioned to me. The factory enjoyed a very high reputation indeed, the bacon it sent out was quoted in the market at higher prices than the Danish, and the factory also served the farmers in Oxfordshire by breaking the ring in the county markets. It was in vain that the dealers came together to

beat down the price of pigs while there was a factory ready to take all suitable baconers at a fair figure.

Another good work that the Kidlington factory was doing was to make farmers realize that they cannot expect to get a good price for all sorts, shapes and sizes of pigs, and that they must study seriously the question of uniformity. In all probability the Kidlington factory would have made even a bigger success had it not been for the selling difficulties. The moment a factory tries to be wholesaler and retailer at once it arouses the opposition of the trade and has to face problems that are often insuperable. So far as one can tell, the general effect of having an up-to-date, well-managed factory in the county had been to increase the interest in pig-keeping, and to encourage farmers to carry a larger stock. Kidlington contributed a promising aspect to the Oxfordshire outlook. They tell me it closed down because farmers broke their pledges.

On the deeper soils in many parts there is a considerable area, 1500 or 1600 acres, of sugar-beet, which is being treated in the county. The School of Agricultural Engineering at Oxford took two or three acres recently for an experiment in a new process of drying. Since the completion of this work, which was undertaken for the Ministry of Agriculture, the factory has been taken over by the Eynsham Sugar Beet Company, which is now handling the product on commercial lines. This factory is one of the most interesting of its kind. Built on the site of the research station, those responsible for it expect to handle about 20,000 tons of beet annually, and to produce 3000 tons of white sugar. All who have followed the output of factories in this country will realize at once that this is a very small amount; the ordinary factory cannot deal with less than 50,000 tons annually if it is to be a thoroughly prosperous proposition, and some have already doubled this figure, but Eynsham is run on different lines, and hopes to employ its staff throughout the year instead of for three months. There are two special drying machines

built as a result of the trials and capable of drying 5 tons of beet per hour. In this way the factory will run from October to December on the drying work alone, and expects to produce about 4500 tons of dried slices, which can be used for sugar production throughout the year. When the drying is completed the manufacturing part of the work will start, and it is said that, owing to a specially designed system of screen and gravel filters, it will be possible to reduce river-pollution to a minimum. It is common knowledge that the ordinary effluent from beet factories is a source of grave trouble, and in many parts of the country riparian owners are up in arms. The sacrifice of fish has been considerable.

There is a considerable milk production in Oxfordshire, and much goes to London, but the increase of late years has been moderate and has not brought about the crisis that may be found in some other counties. The United Dairies have a factory in Banbury, and collect for it in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. The unfortunate aspect of the situation for the farmer is that he is entirely dependent upon the Combine, and if it were to shut the factory he would have the greatest difficulty in finding a market. To make his case harder, the United Dairies supply the churns, the farmer has not any. I heard complaints that the condition of these churns is not always above criticism. It is not easy to find milkers or shepherds, partly because the increase in social life of the village does not appear to have satisfied the lads, and partly because of the great motor-works a few miles out of Oxford, which is said to have taken the pick of the agricultural labour market. Further trouble arising out of this congestion within a certain area is that ordinary cottage accommodation is very hard to find.

Several people in Oxfordshire expressed to the writer the hope that Mr W. R. Morris would solve the problem by building a model town or village—first, for the benefit of his workers, and secondly, for the benefit of those agriculturists who find it almost impossible either to get men

or to house them owing to the factory competition. One authority with whom I discussed the situation says that Oxford is passing through a severe agricultural crisis, and it is due to several causes. In the first place, after the War many men were forced to buy their holdings and lock up their money. Losses since then have reduced their working capital to less than is necessary to enable them to carry on effectively. The men who are holding their own are the family farmers, those who have capable children and who work with them seven days a week. There are complaints that the poor lands of Oxfordshire are too highly rented; the brashy land, which was 15s. an acre before the War, is now 30s., but it is no better than before. Cultivation is costly, and many farmers cannot get a living on it. Undoubtedly the rent will go down or the land will go out of cultivation, but it is a thousand pities that it has not gone down in time to enable hard-working men to stay on. It is in this connexion that one realizes the value of a rent court. I must say that throughout the country there is very little complaint of this kind. In the matter of rent charged, county councils are quite the worst landlords.

The passing of the private owner who had money, and was very favourably disposed towards his tenants, is regarded regretfully all over England, but nowhere more than in Oxfordshire, where they say that the old system is definitely broken down because such landlords as remain are unable to help their tenants through times of crisis and have not the money that a landlord needs to keep his farms in good order.

Some of those with whom I talked are of opinion that the family farm, with all its drawbacks, offers the one possible solution to the general difficulty. At the same time, it is only fair to say that, while Oxfordshire farmers are experiencing such bad times, they are more concerned to make a good fight than to put up loud complaints. The Farmers Co-operative Society, Midland Marts Limited, and the Egg Grading Company at Carterton are thoroughly progressive bodies, and people appear to have

taken advantage of every opportunity of making money by developing what are usually called "side-lines." There is quite a thriving watercress industry at the foot of the Chiltern Hills.

They have lately had a sale of recorded cows in the county, and Oxfordshire combined with the neighbouring county of Berkshire to have another sale of recorded cows at Reading. One sign of weakness to be found in Oxfordshire is a certain reluctance to help smallholders. The Council is playing for safety, and many men who might turn a holding to good account must ask in vain for one. In the whole county there are less than 8000 acres of smallholdings.

Another interesting fact that one notices in Oxfordshire is that farmers are taking their poultry-keeping seriously at last. For long years past, in the backwoods of farmland, poultry have been Mrs Farmer's perquisite. She has taken her husband's "off corn" free of charge, and has sold eggs and birds for pin-money. The hens of hen-wives such as these invariably die in debt. They may lay fifty eggs a year or one hundred and fifty—she will not know; if they thrive she is well pleased, and if they are sick she does not know why, and on all farms of this kind the birds are mongrels and must plead guilty to laying only when eggs are cheap. The Oxfordshire farmer is getting out of the rut. You will find to-day a far better class of bird than you would have found, say, just before the War, and the hen-wife is realizing at last that, if the poultry is properly handled, it may be an asset instead of a liability.

Outside Lancashire I have met farmers who are making many hundreds a year out of poultry-keeping, which they carry on side by side with the ordinary work of the mixed farm, and as the true value of the industry gets better known we may be quite sure that the change of attitude to be noted in Oxford will be found in all directions.

Some good educational work is being carried out by the County Authorities at many winter centres. Oxford, Thame, Witney, Banbury, Chipping Norton, have served

in turn, and farmers of all ages have taken advantage of the opportunity of getting instruction from experts along modern lines. While the average age of those who attend the classes is about thirty, I heard of men of sixty and more who have joined, and have expressed themselves well pleased. In connexion with these classes there are farm demonstrations, at which students are invited to express their opinion about stock and tillage operations. There is a society for discussions and the reading of papers, there is some experimental work, and prizes are given. In the markets men are no longer afraid to be seen going up to the County Organizer, or his representative, and asking for information, though only a few years ago they might have been heard saying that these people could teach them nothing.

The market-gardens round Oxford supply local demands. The orchardists suffer badly from the middlemen, but the traveller through the county has the impression, as he visits the market-towns and talks with farmers, and inquires into the general condition of things, that agriculturists are well aware of the nature of the crisis that is upon them and are striving manfully to meet it. The fashion in which they have in certain instances combined to protect themselves against market-rings is very encouraging. It suggests that a time may come when the farmer will be able to face his worst enemies with a prospect of success.

One cannot leave Oxford without some reference to the work of the Institute of Agricultural Engineering, which is under the general direction of the Ministry of Agriculture and has its headquarters in St Giles. Some of the work done may prove to be of extraordinary importance to the industry. For example, crop-drying is being tried out and the Ministry is now working with an improved type of dryer which burns oil and has given good results. The trouble of the old machine was the burner, but the present fuel-oil type seems to be satisfactory. Crop drying is carried on very successfully in America, where there are machines that will treat as much as 20 tons of

lucerne per day. The same plant can also be used to grind meal, and can handle it at the same rate.

The new sugar-beet method, known as the "de Vecchis," is the one referred to on a previous page, so that nothing more need be said. A rural electrification scheme is also being studied; there is a twelve months' observation trial on some farms in Cheshire. It started, in March of the present year, in an effort to discover how far electricity can be turned to practical account on the farm. A similar inquiry into low-head water installation is contemplated.

In addition to this work, the Institute of Agricultural Engineering is prepared to test agricultural machinery and to state what its capacity really is. On this side alone the Institute would justify its existence, if it had not done other and even more valuable work, because it is common knowledge that the farmer is very liable to be caught by the specious pleadings of glib salesmen and to invest in machines that have not been properly tested, and may yield nothing better than disappointment, in return for a considerable expenditure.

When we remember that Oxford has also a School of Agricultural Economy, and that this school carries on a series of far-reaching inquiries into costings, there seems no reason why the Oxfordshire farmer, in spite of bad times, should not be able to make the best of his limited opportunities.

OXFORD, *August.*



CHAPTER XXX

H A M P S H I R E

THE agricultural position in Hampshire during the summer of 1927 was distinctly unsatisfactory because, owing to the general nature of the soil, and its effect upon farming practice, it has not been possible so far to find new methods for old acres. Sugar-beet is ruled out in all save the extreme south and in a few places in the east, elsewhere the soil is either too flinty or lacks depth ; it has not even been necessary or advisable to establish a factory for the small acreage that is given to this crop. Ordinary arable is under a cloud, and the old rotation—two root crops, wheat, barley and seeds—has the effect of holding up the farmer's capital for so long a period that he gets into debt. In this limitation of turnover we may find one of the main causes of depression.

Years ago the Hampshire Down sheep, so good to look upon as they bunched on the great open pastures of their district, passed out of favour. Since 1913 there has been a 30 per cent. drop in their numbers, a shrinkage that is reflected with very definite significance at the sheep fairs. For example, at Britford, just over the Wiltshire border, where, so late as 1908, 100,000 sheep would be penned, the last returns give a comparatively insignificant figure. Salisbury, Stockbridge, Alresford, Weyhill, all show declines, and even those who keep ram-breeding flocks find they cannot face the market, because the Down sheep are accustomed to receive 2 lbs. of concentrates per day for ewe and lamb from January to August. Even when the Hampshire Downs are brought to maturity there is no big market for them ; the tendency nowadays is to favour small joints.

This decline in the Down flocks has had a marked effect upon the arable acreage ; it has helped to rule out turnips, and has brought much tillage-land to grass, and to the

service of all manner of alien sheep that may be regarded as still in an experimental stage.

Many Hampshire farmers rely upon their dairying, but even this industry is in an unsatisfactory condition, because, owing to the great increase of supplies and the lack of a demand that will absorb them readily, buyers are growing more critical, and are insisting upon a standard in the matter of butter-fat content and solids that farmers find difficult to reach or to maintain. Selective breeding has not flourished in this county of late years, and it is a significant fact that the highest achievement at a recent Hampshire Show was by a Friesian, which gave 87 lbs. of milk in the day, with a 4 per cent. butter-fat content. Apparently some of the breeders of Friesians have realized where they were lacking and have taken steps to correct the condition.

There is much barley grown for malting in Hampshire, but there are those who say that the samples are not so good as they were, and consequently it is more difficult to sell to the maltsters. Fruit does well in the south: there are nearly 5000 acres given up to strawberries in and around Botley, and the men working this land are smallholders—though Hampshire, taken altogether, is a county of large farms. It is on wide areas with ample space to use, or misuse, that farmers have carried on through varying times. Nowadays the difficulties are greater, though wages are not high, the minimum being 30s.

Apparently agriculture is losing its popularity among the farm-workers of Hampshire; it is extremely hard to get casual labour outside the fruit-picking areas, where gipsies do a great deal of the work, and many of the boys of the agricultural labourer are seeking employment in towns, leaving farmland behind them. The big land-owners are feeling the pinch of bad times, and I am told that many farms are coming into the market in the autumn of the present year, and that the chances of those who take them are not very rosy, because of the lack of some special line of production that will meet a period of transition.

Milk prices have been cut to the subsistence-level, and the Farmers Co-Operative Society, which was quite a thriving undertaking at one time, fell upon evil days, and was forced ultimately to submit to absorption in one of the combines. There is a Southern Counties Agricultural Co-operative Society that flourishes and appears to receive support, but, generally speaking, the land in Hampshire is difficult to turn to profit, save in the neighbourhood of the New Forest and in the south, and on the Sussex side of the border, notably on the hop-lands round Alton and Petersfield. One agriculturist who has expert knowledge told the writer that in his opinion it does not suffice to grow good crops. The man who is to pay his way must also be a very good business man, quick to take advantage of every occasion that arises, and he instanced a prosperous farmer in the south of the county who is spending 25s. per acre on artificial manures, and growing corn, sugar-beet, milk, poultry and pigs, all at a profit.

There are three "Young Farmers Clubs" in Hampshire, one of which, in the north by Kingsclere, has flourished exceedingly in the past few years.

The most hopeful aspect of the situation in the county is found perhaps when we turn to the educational effort. At Sparsholt, near Winchester, the County Council has a Farm Institute where men and women receive a course of training and all who seek advice may find it. Some experimental work is being carried on there, together with dairying, poultry- and bee-keeping, and general farming. The value of this work is seen not only by the ever-widening area of inquiry, but by the eagerness with which students who have had only as much as a year's training are sought after by those progressive farmers who are determined to struggle with the period of depression and to win through. I heard of a case of a lad who is just out of his time and advertised in an agricultural paper for a job, stating that he had been at Sparsholt for a year; he received forty-two replies to his three-line appeal.

The County Educational Committee also runs a travel-

ling dairy school. I am told it has been on the road for over thirty years. An instructress and her assistant are the officials, and to-day the travelling is done by motor-van. The plant, consisting of churns, butter-workers, pails, cheese tubs, vat, boiler, and all the small things necessary, is taken from one centre to the next over the week-end, so that the classes start on the Monday.

The method of arranging instruction is quite simple. If a village in Hampshire wants a class, for either cheese or butter, it sends a formal application to the Education Office, and a date is fixed. Cheese-making occupies the time from March to September, and then butter-making is carried on until the next spring. If more than sixteen pupils give in their names at any centre the two-weeks course is extended to four weeks, half the students coming for the first fortnight and the others for the second. At the end of the course there is an examination, and any pupil gaining over 90 per cent. of the marks is offered a scholarship to attend the Farm Institute at Sparsholt for five weeks free of charge. Twelve of these scholarships were awarded during the year. Classes meet in the afternoon from 2-5 P.M., and out of the three hours two and a half are given to practical work. On the first day that the travelling dairy school comes to any town or village there is a demonstration, at which visitors as well as those who intend to be pupils are welcome. At the end of the demonstration questions are asked, and arrangements are made to call at farms in the neighbourhood where advice is wanted.

On the last day the necessary examination is held. For some years past the months of October and November have been devoted to instruction in the Isle of Wight.

These pleasant labours have undoubtedly done much to improve the quality of the cheese- and butter-making in the county. Some years ago the Ministry of Agriculture was conducting similar tours; I remember going, while in the service of the Ministry, to study the methods of some of the cheese schools in the wildest part of Wales, so far from railway stations that farmers were delighted to send their

milk to a centre within reasonable distance of their holdings and have it made into cheese, which was sold along co-operative lines. The great trouble with the experiment in Wales was that the instructresses were far too attractive; taking them as a class I have never seen a prettier and healthier set of young women. Naturally the school could be established only a few weeks before some farmer had persuaded the instructress to devote to him the knowledge, the charm and the graces that were intended for the general body of agriculturists. I have forgotten, or was never told, how Whitehall met the trouble.

SPARSHOLT, HANTS, *August.*



INTERLUDE

AN ORCHARDIST

THE old man beckoned me into his orchard, which covers a considerable area and has been well planted with choice fruit. All the apples were standards of perhaps fifteen years' growth, fillers placed between them had been removed and bush fruit substituted. The place had the air of being well tended, weeds were quite under control, even though this year has given them free play in nearly every direction.

"My hobby," he said, almost apologetically, as we moved along the paths between the trees, noting the careful fashion in which they had been handled. There was ample room for them to expand, there were no crowded centres, and where the frost had not struck in blossoming time there was a very fair show of good-quality fruit.

"My hobby," he repeated. "I suppose if it had not been I should have scrapped this orchard long ago. Many would have done so in my place and sought to raise a crop that would yield something, however little."

"But," I said, "surely with fruit of this kind, if it is carefully packed and graded, you can command a certain market somewhere?"

He smiled. "Down to the War," he said, "it was possible to get a trifling return and to show an annual profit of a very few pounds. If the profit reached double figures I was well content, because even then whatever you sent to London fell into the hands of—let me say commission agents, because it sounds best. Since the War, on the other hand," he went on, "the position has changed for the worse, because the cost of carriage has become so much greater. Then, too, the price of picking and packing and grading and the rest is higher than it ever was, and the middlemen who handle the produce have grown more expert, more daring and, if I may say so, more unscrupulous. I allowed them to have my fruit until they began to charge me for

the privilege of sending it to them, and then I thought the time had come to call a halt."

"What happens now?" I asked him.

"There's a man living not far from here," he said, "who comes over every autumn with his sons and strips the trees very carefully. I am too old to do the work myself and it is not easy to find pickers. He leaves me sufficient of the best to provide for my needs during the winter and takes the bulk for his trouble."

"Is this all you have been able to do for yourself?" I inquired, and he nodded.

"I get the fruit picked, the trees cleared and no damage done," he said. "Then again, my home is supplied. I have a cousin with a cherry orchard in the Cotswolds and he tells me that the fruit has not paid for the picking this year, and consequently he has left it to rot on the branches."

Twenty-four hours later I motored through a thriving county town not more than an hour's run from the old man's orchard. Eating apples that would not compare with those I had seen ripening on the trees the day before were marked at 8d. per lb. I inquired about cherries, and was told that the price in the shop had ranged from 1s. 4d. down to 8d. as the season advanced.

At these figures, the shopkeeper admitted, a little scornfully, the housewife with limited means cannot buy fruit. Under existing conditions, no man without special facilities for marketing can afford to grow it.

Yet, if the grower could obtain one half of the price the consumer would be glad to pay he could raise fruit in abundance, and at a handsome profit. Unfortunately, between consumer and producer stands the middleman, and still more unfortunately the shopkeeper to-day prefers to sell a small quantity at a high profit rather than a large quantity at a low price. So, between the middleman and the shopkeeper, the housewife of limited means must fall back on something out of a tin, a tin that was filled by a foreigner

who is making the profit that belongs by right to an English grower.

Here one touches no more than the fringe of a very great scandal. In my wanderings up and down England during the summer I have met with other striking examples of the fashion in which producer at one end and consumer at the other are suffering from those who stand between. These examples, relating as they do to our fish supply and to imported fruit, would not be in place here.



CHAPTER XXXI

FARMING IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

AS all the world knows, dairying is the most outstanding industry on Buckinghamshire farms, and owing to the quality of the pastures, and the herds that graze them; the county is a centre that has attracted many of the great buying firms. The United Dairies are at work in Aylesbury, so too is the firm of Nestlé; Hookers are in Buckinghamshire and there is another important company at Bletchley. Horlicks malt their milk in the south and Wellers are busy in the Cheddington district.

At first sight one would think that all this activity would lead to competition, and that the farmer would be getting a good, or at least a fair, price for his milk, but I was told that the milk producers round Aylesbury receive 7d. per gallon from the Combine for their summer milk, and we may be quite sure that where industrialists are gathered together they do not waste time in competing against one another for the produce necessary to their business. They meet and arrange the figure that may—perhaps—enable the producer to carry on, and is quite safe to leave them a substantial profit. So the dairy farmers in Buckinghamshire have a serious problem to face, and from what I could gather there is considerable danger of reduction in the herds. Little as one likes the Combines and their methods, it is only just to them to state that they are not entirely responsible for the bad conditions. One of the difficulties felt very much in this country is the statutory hours of labour. Farmers find themselves compelled to milk twice within nine hours if they are to avoid the expense of overtime and are to keep within the law. It is obvious that if the animals are milked, say, at six o'clock in the morning and three o'clock in the afternoon, the farmer will find himself with a certain amount of milk that has less than the proper standard of butter-fat. Now, owing to the enormous output of milk in Buckinghamshire, the buyers are in the position

of being able to scrutinize everything very closely, and the result is that many perfectly honest men have found themselves summoned, at the instance of the local authorities, for selling inferior milk, though their cows are good, they are feeding properly and there is no suggestion of adulteration.

The minimum wage is 31s. and overtime is 9d. an hour, so it will be seen that if a man puts a couple of hours extra on to his labour in the dairy he is going to raise wages by half-a-guinea a week, and while his milk must be produced to yield a profit at 7d. per gallon he may well find himself in a position in which he cannot pay his way. "Summer-time" is good for the community at large, limited hours are right and proper, our system of free imports serves the national need—but all these things are bad for the farmer.

The main breed of cow to which he looks for aid in tiding the crisis is the Dairy Shorthorn, of which you find a particularly fine type in the north of the county, though the Lincoln Red is beginning to creep in. Here and there one meets a herd of Friesians, and it is hard to find two experts who agree in their valuation of this particular type of cow. There are some who will tell you that the thousands of gallons that are yielded during a lactation period are little better than water so far as butter-fat goes; on the other hand there are cases on record where a Friesian has beaten the Dairy Shorthorn at agricultural shows, the judgment being passed on milk actually drawn on the show-ground. I heard, under the rose, of one Friesian that achieved considerable results after the first gallon had been taken from her and thrown away!

The county's interest in farming is shown by the number of clubs for young farmers. There is a Bletchley Dairy Shorthorn Club, which distributed thirty-two calves this year to its members, and I heard of another calf club in Buckingham. Pig-keepers favour the large white and middle white, with a few Berkshires and large blacks, but the general tendency is to rely on the first cross, and a very

wise tendency, so far as the writer's own farming practice has taught him. The importance of breeding young beef is recognized by many farmers in Buckinghamshire, but stock-fattening is not a pursuit that appears to thrive here; perhaps, if it were, the farmers of the county would be worse off. The two big markets, Slough and Aylesbury, are separated by the Chilterns, and farmers complained to me that as soon as the butchers have taken what they want the rest of the bidding is confined to one voice, that cries on behalf of the ring and buys for resale.

There is little soil in Buckinghamshire that is suitable for sugar-beet, and that little is to be found in the north. The land in the Vale of Aylesbury is apparently too heavy. The Chilterns themselves are not what is required, and the beautiful soil of the south is taken up by market-gardeners. The Thames Valley growers are an extremely able company, they contrive to get most-favoured-nation treatment from Covent Garden. They do not send their consignments to the wholesaler and get a note back demanding a certain amount of money because the consignment has not paid the expenses. They have learned how to avoid this experience, and some of them do extremely well, sending direct from the gardens by motor-van or lorry into the market, and so saving all those intermediate handlings that play havoc with the quality of fruit and vegetables and add so greatly to the cost of transport. One grower in the south of the county loads up on his own vehicles, and sends direct to Southampton for a great steamship company. I tried in vain to learn the method by which one consigns safely to Covent Garden, the secret is too closely guarded.

From what one can gather, brains and initiative, both of the best class, are required to bring fruit-growing to a favourable issue out here, but the occasion has produced the men. Circumstances have favoured some of the growers this year. For example, in the Wing urban district there has been a great season for prune-damsons, and the price proved good because the Worcestershire crop was a partial failure, but the happy growers, who can find no cause

for complaint in 1927, point out that they have not had a good crop since the hot summer of 1921. In the Stone district, south-west of Aylesbury, the plums have done well, but the cherry-growers have much to complain about. It is a significant fact, and shows how urgently reform on our market system is called for, that the price paid to the grower for his cherries at the end of the season would not pay for the picking of them, and both on the Chilterns and on the Cotswolds there were cherry orchards in which the fruit was allowed to fall from or rot on the trees. Yet the price in the shops has carried cherries out of the reach of all save those who have a full pocket and are willing to submit to the imposition of the shopkeeper, who will either have his price or consign fruit to the dustbin. Surely the time cannot be far off when municipalities will be forced to handle the crops that wholesalers and middlemen exploit for their own benefit at the expense of the public.

Carefully considered, agriculture and horticulture in Buckinghamshire are in a bad way, not for lack of good soil, first-class stock or abundant produce, but because of the abiding difficulties in our marketing system and the fact that the farmers cannot or will not combine to help themselves. One dairy farmer remarked: "It is all very well to talk of revolt, but if United Dairies and Nestlé and Horlick and the rest of them were to close their factories we should be ruined." It was in vain to point out to him that, if these firms were compelled to close their factories, they too would be very hard hit, and that if all farmers would agree on a fair price for milk, and would refuse to supply it for less, they would be able to hold their own. Sometimes one thinks that the farmer is so impressed by the sight of a great factory able to handle its thousands of gallons of milk that he forgets how far that factory relies upon his sound acts of husbandry in order to keep going. He is overawed by mere size.

AYLESBURY, *September*.

CHAPTER XXXII

DERELICT ACRES

“**H**OW is the city become desolate ! ”

From Chesham to Chesham the speedometer registered thirty miles, but even before the pleasant little town was out of sight the first neglected field, 40 to 50 acres in extent, stood up against the skyline. For two summers in succession the grass has been advertised for haying, without response. Then Shepherd's Farm on the outskirts revealed itself, behind wide spaces of common-land smothered in gorse and bramble. Bought from Lord Chesham a few years ago, the frontages have been sold for building ; behind these lie some 200 deserted acres, all until lately in good cultivation, sound arable on a chalk and gravel subsoil. Over bad roads one sees two places given up to pheasant-rearing ; then comes the holding of a man who has striven hard for twenty-seven years and is at his last gasp. He is paying £200 rent for 180 acres, works with one assistant and says : “ When I find that by staying I must sacrifice my creditors, I'll go. It can't be long now. My wife and children and I live no better than, perhaps not as well as, the agricultural labourer. I keep going on bread-and-dripping.”

By Gaddesden is a man whose forbears farmed for nearly a couple of hundred years in the district. He was sold up a year ago, but is allowed to live in the house until a tenant comes—there has been one man to see the place in the twelvemonth. Here are 230 acres, 200 of them arable. The owners have tried to keep the land clean by steam-plough, but only 12 acres have been planted. Near by, on a holding of less than 100 acres, the tenant was evicted recently, his crops seized on account of dilapidations, his wife and eleven children, seven under nine years old, one imbecile, and one a baby at the breast, turned into the road—the policemen who carried out the ejectment order moved, says local gossip, to tears. They too had families, and sympathies. The arrears of rent, men say, did not exceed £30 !

Eight farms were named by the old man of family tradition as being empty now. They cover some 2000 acres. He himself is at the end of his tether, but can tell of the time when he held annual sales of live stock on his holding. One yielded £1000. This was in 1908; he showed the catalogue with pride. He kept 40 to 60 head of cattle, 200 sheep, fattened 200 pigs, employing twelve men from Studham, the neighbouring village; you could find over a hundred men in agricultural employment in those days. To-day there are in Studham but eight who work on farms: the rest go on bicycles to Hemel Hempstead, Luton or Dunstable—the building trade absorbs them.

A mile or two away an old man sits solitary on a farm of 200 acres, under notice these three years. Good corn-land his, on the heavy side. He has farmed for thirty-seven years, and now lives on £1 per week, paid for looking after a horse and a cow. Everything has been lost since 1920, his crops taken for “dilapidations”—these dilapidations, he alleges, relating in part to fences that he cut and set up by his own labour. He says he took 80 derelict acres into his holding, at 10s. per acre, to clear and clean, and that he raised profitable crops, but nothing in the way of toil or expenditure in the good years, when he spent hundreds on the farm, has availed to save him now. His horizon is bounded by the workhouse.

On the ridge of Dunstable Downs is another arable farm fallen to ruin, hedges seemingly too thin and fences too insecure to permit of stock-keeping.

Past Dagnall, with Herts on the one hand, Bucks on the other, one sees on the Hertfordshire side what looks like miles of arable land in ruin. Yet five or six years ago a rotation of crops was the rule here; the soil is good and light, easily worked two-horse land. One of these derelict holdings in years past won the silver tea-and-coffee-service presented at a county show for the best-cultivated farm in the district. To-day there is one green field. I saw a single set of steam-plough tackle at work, and for the rest a desolation—neither man nor beast to be seen.

How comes it that land within thirty miles of London—not only the 2000 acres passed in rapid survey here, but at least another 3000 within short distance—has fallen on such evil days? There is a story that a group of foreigners negotiated for a large area to grow sugar-beet, that tenants in arrears with rent received hasty notice, that creditors came down on them and bankruptcy ensued. Then, they say, negotiations fell through, and the farms, though advertised, have failed to attract. These statements, coming from men advanced in years, who have lost all their substance, must be taken with reserve, but there is a certain measure of agreement in each recital, coloured perchance by the anger or resignation of workers who have deserved better of their country.

One who knows the district intimately said that down to 1924 no farm remained empty; men competed for good, accepted medium, and were prepared to tackle bad land for a consideration in the way of low rent.

Another, who can recall the black years following 1879—his father weathered them—said: "We had a grant from the landlord then, and we ground the labourer down. There were 22 men on our farms earning 11s. per week. Father said to them: 'You must be cut down to 20 or take 10s. per week each instead of 11s.' They thought it out and took the 10s. To-day the Wages Boards won't let us do that kind of thing, and the landlords, with their taxes and super-taxes and death-duties, are fighting for their lives. Their agents, surveyors and valuers squeeze us as we squeezed the farm-labourer. In the name of 'dilapidations' they take our harvest in the stack and our crops in the fields; and the Agricultural Act doesn't help the farmer who can't face his creditors."

Allowing four quarters of wheat to the acre, the corn production of the derelict lands near to where three counties meet, thirty miles from town, is 5000 tons. An Empire emigration scheme aims at sending men 6000 miles away to the Canadian prairie, or 16,000 miles to Australia, where virgin land, lacking roads and rail, invites corn-

growing. But suitable land is waiting for corn within an hour's run of the metropolis of the Empire.

"The cities don't care. While they can be fed from abroad, we may starve after a lifetime's work."

So spoke yet another who sees trouble bearing down upon him, and says that, for one farm derelict to-day, there will be ten in a few years' time.

CHESHAM.



INTERLUDE

TWO STRAY CHATS

ON the marshlands, in a hasty visit to an old home, I talked with a clergyman who has lived long in his deserted parish, and finds time to fulfil all his duties and pursue the studies that are to him the delight of his simple, fruitful life. He was talking of the fashion in which the parish has fallen away.

"Scores of cottages," he said, "have disappeared in the last five-and-thirty years. There was a time when all this hundred grew corn, when the population was more than twice or thrice what it is to-day. Then the farmers could pick and choose their men, and their wives could have the most promising of the maids, before those they did not need went away to service. Later came the season of depression in the eighties, nearly fifty years ago, when the farmers allowed their land to fall down to grass. There has been no enduring recovery since then, because, although there were a few good years before 1914, and farmers made a lot of money while the War was being waged, the breakdown of the policy of 1919-1920 has brought things back to a hopeless state again.

"The trouble is," he went on, "that farmers, not finding a lead, can think of no way of improving the position save by putting more land down to grass and turning more labour adrift. They say about here that they must carry four men to 100 acres under the plough, but one man can serve 100 acres of grass. There is nothing to keep the men on the land; their wages are poor, their homes are unspeakable, and many are living in condemned cottages because there is nothing better to be had. Such powers as the district councils have to build houses are exercised very sparingly. If the average councillor had as much respect for human beings as he has for the rates there might be some little progress, but, as things are, I fear that he would rather save pennies than lives. If you

want to know the full extent of conditions that result from our present haphazard ways, go to the county town and attend the Assize Court, and then try to remember that we are living in A.D. 1927."

An old grey labourer, eating his midday meal of dry bread, hard cheese and an onion, washed down with cold tea out of a tin can, said, without any complaint in his voice, that the present conditions are worse than the old ones. "I know," he said, "that where we used to get 12s. or 14s. we get 30s., but when I was getting 12s. bread was 5d. a quartern loaf, and now it's 10d., and fat pork was 6d. a lb., and now I cannot afford to buy it, and we could have all the skimmed milk we wanted at a ½d. quart, and now it is separated, no better than water. Beer was 2d. a pint and now it is 5d.; tobacco is twice the price, and so is every other thing we have to buy; so that the money is not as good as it was. Yet Master says he cannot afford to pay the wages, and he is putting more land down to grass. I have known us have fourteen stacks in the yard, and this year we have six. There is only one thing I have got to be grateful for, and that is that both my boys are out of it: one of them is a policeman and the other's got a job in ——" and he named the county town. "When I'm worn out my family will have done with the land."

The parish registers show this man's forbears as village workers. They have been on the land for over three hundred years.

IN THE HUNDRED OF DENGIE, *August.*

CHAPTER XXXIII

SMALLHOLDING IN THE SOUTHERN MIDLANDS

IT is only after travelling far and wide through England that the national response to the attractions of smallholding can be gauged with some approach to accuracy. In great cities like London the question is often discussed in purely academic fashion. It is treated sometimes as though it belonged to the realm of politics, and most of us have heard smallholdings derided on no better ground than that they are a plank of the Liberal agricultural platform. But once you get into the heart of England, and talk to the men who are running their few acres, or are striving in the face of great and unnecessary difficulties to secure some, you realize how tremendously strong is the instinct that urges the worker to leave the city and to live in a cottage with a meadow or two round it, to labour with the aid of wife and family to raise first his own food and then a surplus for the market that shall enable him to buy the necessities that his fields will not provide. It should be quite clear to any man who will look at the question without prejudice that, whether the smallholding is or is not an economic proposition, there are tens of thousands of sturdy men waiting to acquire one; indeed it is not necessary to suggest that there is no economic soundness in work of this kind. The men and women who are engaged in it appear for the great part to be rejoicing in hard labour; and, if only they could get fair play when they go to market with their produce, there is no limit to the possibilities of life on the land. They are, too, England's most intensive cultivators. I do not hesitate to say that many county councils, faced with the responsibility for a share of the losses incurred on holdings under their direction, are deliberately putting difficulties in the way of applicants, though if they would only employ the wider vision they could not fail to see

that by their action they are obstructing a movement which is closely bound up with the welfare of England.

In the Southern Midlands the figures are really astonishing, because we have to remember that if the land occupied by these sturdy husbandmen were being farmed on the big—and consequently extensive—scale the rent in many cases would be no more than half, and the yield would be infinitely less, because few large farmers handle their land on the lines of greatest output, while the smallholder must ; he has no choice.

Let us consider the smallholdings in half-a-dozen Midland counties—Bedford, Huntingdon, Leicestershire, Northampton, Rutland, Hertford. Bedfordshire comes first, with an area of over 13,000 acres of smallholdings, which realize a rent of more than £32,000. Of these holdings nearly 1300 do not exceed 5 acres, and there are as many that do not exceed 20. It is clear that the rent, which is round about 50s. an acre, is more than the agricultural value of the land in bulk. It would be quite easy to rent considerable farms in Bedfordshire for much less than 50s. an acre, but the smallholder always pays for the privilege of working hard and enjoying a very minimum of leisure.

In Huntingdonshire there are nearly 12,000 acres of smallholdings, yielding over £36,000 in rent, the average coming out at a very high figure, about 62s. 6d. per acre. Of these holdings, 464 are under 5 acres, 716 are less than 20. In Leicestershire 8000 acres yield £17,000, in Northamptonshire 4500 acres yield about £8500. The lowest rents apparently are from Rutland, where the average is 31s. per acre. Hertfordshire has given 6000 acres to smallholdings and takes nearly £12,000 in rent, while in the Soke of Peterborough the County Council draws just upon £10,000 a year for about 3600 acres. These figures are extraordinarily eloquent ; they tell a story of vigour and determination and of an initial penalizing of endeavour, for much of the land that I have seen is not worth, either from the standpoint of soil or proximity to towns,

the rent demanded and paid. The conditions under which the work is done are well worth a closer inquiry, so that a few words on each county in turn can hardly be out of place.

In Huntingdonshire smallholders are struggling splendidly; in the north-east of the county, where the soil is good, they are actually making money. Their main crops are potatoes, corn and sugar-beet, and they send produce to London, South Wales and the North of England. Their beet goes to the new factory at Peterborough. In the centre of the county, where the land is poor and the farming is mixed and on the extensive side, farmers who are engaged in stock-raising and corn-growing have plenty of troubles. In the fens of the county the sugar-beet is prospering and in the country round Somersham fruit, most of which goes to London, appears to be on the increase: St Neots and St Ives are the chief markets, and the men who are making money on the smallholdings are those who have a family whose help is given freely. The wife should be a practical woman, she must be able to milk cows and feed pigs and rear poultry, and to do a little packing and grading in due season, if a holding is to prosper. They will tell you in Huntingdonshire that their worst foe is not the country's fiscal system, it is not the weather; they are prepared to compete with free imports and to face the worst that Jupiter Pluvius can do to them; it is the middleman who is their constant and unrelenting enemy. Because of his machinations they must struggle very hard to win a living wage from seven days' labour. Yet, when you point out to any of these people that they can, and would, defeat the middleman by co-operating, they shrink aghast. It is better apparently to work on the borderland of poverty than to let your neighbour know what you are growing and what you are getting for it. As one struggling man said to me: "I've kept myself to myself all my life; I don't want neighbours prying into my affairs and they won't want me prying into theirs."

Bedfordshire is ringed round with smallholdings. There

are many in the north and in the south, there are some in the west, and market-gardening is extending on the east side, but the market-gardeners of Bedford and its immediate neighbourhood appear to be hard pressed—certainly they depend upon small odd jobs for which cash is paid to enable them to pay their way. The county is famous for brussels sprouts—fully 40 per cent. of the national supply comes from this one area; there are 10,000 acres down to this crop.

In Leicestershire the smallholdings lie largely in the south of the county; Kilby is a centre. There are some in the west and a few in the north, but you do not find any in the middle. Many men in Leicestershire who cannot aspire to smallholdings are showing great interest in allotments, and are forming associations to acquire the freehold of their ground in order that they may have security of tenure. A very rapid glance at conditions in this paradise of the hunting man reveals genuine depression; the big farmers appear to have made a deal of money during the War and to have lost the greater part of it since. Naturally they cling to standards of living that are not easy to maintain. The graziers find that the price of stores is put up against them and that their finished product is not a paying proposition. It goes without saying that they have yet to learn that the market does not want heavy beasts, and, even if it did, would not pay a price that could yield a profit on three-year-olds.

In Northamptonshire, where the land is really very good and the farming is worthy of it, there are not many smallholdings, and what there are appear to avoid the east and north-east of the county. Grass preponderates, and even the smallholders are dairymen. Some of them seek to escape the tender mercies of the great London Combine by selling in the Midlands. It may be said, in general terms, that Northamptonshire is a county that approaches Lincolnshire in its general prosperity. In the Soke of Peterborough, where, as I pointed out, smallholders pay very high rents, they contrive to thrive, and there would

be considerable development if the Ministry of Agriculture had not deliberately forfeited the right to tell county councils to get on with their business. Why these bodies should hesitate, in view of their rent-roll, it is hard to say; the only conclusion one can come to is that the majority of the gentlemen who sit on these councils ought to be engaged in some other occupation where they would be less obstructive to their fellow-men.

In Hertfordshire smallholdings are scattered, and this is not surprising, because the land of that agreeable county is very poor, and while it serves admirably for parks, and pleasure places of the rich, it cannot claim to play any significant rôle in the work of food production. There is too much chalk, too much gravel and not enough rich soil anywhere. There is a smallholding estate at Baldock where the rents are comparatively low, but the County Council can get nearly £2 an acre and the probabilities are that any man who wishes to farm in Hertfordshire can hire a very considerable holding for little more than half that figure. Grass is going down at a great rate in this county and much of it seems at a casual glance to be self-sown. The most promising industry in Hertfordshire is apparently poultry production. There is a return of nearly 500,000 head of birds, and as holdings under one acre are not included we may be sure that the real figure is considerably above this. In this connexion Leicestershire heads the counties that have been noticed, making a return of nearly 600,000 poultry, and Northamptonshire stands a little above Hertfordshire. In the last-named county orcharding appears to be on the increase.

I asked a man of great experience, whose sympathy with the smallholders and their difficulties is the product of many years' close observation, what he thought of existing conditions, and he declared frankly that the middleman is the smallholder's worst enemy, and that he is inclined to place the motor-bus second on the list. The temptation to leave the holding and run into the nearest town to spend an evening at what they call a "picture palace" is

overwhelming, he told me. If we cannot wonder at this development, we must at least deplore it, because it keeps the young men and women from the work that should absorb them, and gives them interests that they would be better without. The smallholder must scorn delights and live laborious days; when he seeks to combine the amusements of the town with the delights of the country he enters upon the road that leads to disappointment and disillusion.

SOUTHERN MIDLANDS, *August*.

P.S.—This chapter concludes the story of the rapid survey of agricultural England, and it is well to point out that, since the story was set down, a disastrous harvest has made the situation far worse than it was, dashing the reasonable hopes of many who had done all they could to deserve the success no farmer can command.

January, 1928.



INTERLUDE

THE MAKING OF A WASTREL

DOWN in the village an old man of my acquaintance has just died in evil odour and bad repute. He had dragged out an existence in the chimney-corner, contributing 9s. per week of his pension money to a very unsympathetic daughter-in-law, a widow. In the last few years of his life he became a cadger, a loafer and, in small ways, a poacher, always on the brink of trouble, but never falling quite over the edge.

I can recall the time when he was hard-working and thrifty; the only son of an old labourer who had a splendid record; he started life, they say, with excellent, if limited, prospects.

The father had inherited from one of his wife's relations a delightful cottage under what is called copyhold tenure—a tenure that became extinct a year ago, after working countless cruelties throughout the length and breadth of the land. Under it, the inheritor had to pay a fine to the lord of the manor in order that he might take possession. The dead man's father was able, at the sacrifice of most of his savings, to meet this demand and to have a home of his own with a very decent piece of garden-ground round it, and some excellent fruit-trees. Here the son lived until the father died, and during the last few years the old man's needs made saving an impossibility, because there was no Old Age Pension then, and the agricultural wage was 14s. per week.

So soon as the father died the lords of the manor claimed their fine, and the son had no means wherewith to pay it. He was evicted, but under the law it was impossible for the lords of the manor to take the cottage over until they had "proclaimed" it three times. These manor lords were the representatives of a distant corporation, and came to that part of the country only once in three years, and, as it happened the old man died a few months after one of

their visits, they could not proclaim the cottage for the first time for three years, although they were able to evict the son at once. When they proclaimed the little place for the third and last time it had been empty nine years.

Those who know the countryside will understand what nine years' neglect and emptiness means to a cottage that is built on an elm frame with lath and plaster and a thatched roof. I remember the place when thistles had grown up between the boards, the thatch had been riddled by rats, starlings and sparrows, the garden was a wilderness, rain had drifted in through the casements, and yet only a few years had passed then since the eviction. By the time the cottage was finally proclaimed, and became the property of the manor lords, there was nothing to be done with it, and consequently it was allowed to fall into ruin.

The man who should have been the owner, deprived of the home that he had expected to keep, ceased to be a thrifty, hard-working, reputable farm-labourer. Beer was cheap then, and he drowned his sorrows in it. He and his wife and two children found a three-roomed hovel, of which one room was not fit for habitation. They lived there as best they could, she going out to take odd jobs in the village, and he gradually losing his status on the farm until the time came when he received notice. By this time his little girl had married and gone to the north of England, where she died, and his son had married and become the father of one or two children. Then he died, and there was nobody left to the old man but a daughter-in-law and the Old Age Pension, which in the end kept a roof over his head.

There are just a few who know the truth and place their sympathies in the right direction, but the great majority are only too ready and willing to condemn. It sounds like old history, but it is well to remember that so recently as 1925 this tenure remained, and even to-day, in the village of which I write, there are so many cottages that "go with the farm" that the tenants have no sense of independence. Not only are their rights diminished, but, as some of them will tell you, they have the ever-present fear of eviction

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when they grow old, because so soon as the farmer decides that he wants a younger man he can give them notice, and apply for an ejectment order if they do not respond. Cases have come within the scope of my own observation where the rent of cottages has been raised against the tenant in flat defiance of the Rent Restriction Act, and so late as August, and while this book was in the making, I found a widow of seventy-five under notice to quit a cottage in which she has lived many years. Her husband worked through forty years for the man who, at the time of writing, is endeavouring to consign her to a two-room hovel.



CHAPTER XXXIV

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING

I HAVE written so much in these pages about the marketing problem that it is only fair to point out that the Ministry of Agriculture is taking steps to improve conditions. It is well to remember that, year in and year out, the Ministry does make an honest attempt to help the farmer whose needs it may claim to understand. The trouble is that the permanent officials must always keep one eye on the politicians and another on the Treasury. They cannot do what is best for agriculture, first, because "My Lords" are very slow to part, and are in the habit of devoting a great part of their considerable talent to cutting down estimates, and, in the second place, the politicians must be considered, and the politicians in their turn are compelled to watch the urban population. The townsman does not like the agriculturist, and is not really interested in his troubles, having quite sufficient of his own. It follows then that it is difficult for the best-intentioned Ministry to do what it would like to do for those whom it exists to serve, but official ingenuity is really remarkable, and, in spite of all the obstacles that the Treasury and the politicians put in its way, the Ministry does help the farmer. Marketing provides a case in point. The Linlithgow Commission made many definite recommendations. To have accepted them would have meant to offend that section of the urban community which lives by robbing the farmer; consequently, Lord Linlithgow's Reports were shelved. But the Ministry, recognizing the danger to agriculture of existing chaotic conditions in the market, and seeing that, while considerable study has been given to the importance of production, there has been little real change in the way produce is handled, has made a modest effort in the right direction.

It has often been pointed out that the British producer must break the inertia of custom and that standardization with organization is the direction in which he must move.

British farm-produce is meeting with an intensifying competition from all parts of the world. Imported produce is at a great commercial advantage on account of regularity of supply, evenness of quality, and other considerations which facilitate business on a large scale. Many wholesale distributors find it at once more convenient and more profitable to handle imported rather than home produce, and in the wholesale marts at large centres of demand the latter is steadily losing ground. There can be little doubt that standardization is the real secret of the commercial success of imported produce. It is true that goods exported to this country have, of necessity, to be concentrated at certain ports for shipment, and that this facilitates some measure of control over quality; but the fact that their problem is rather more difficult and complicated does not save home producers from the necessity of applying all their energies to its solution. After all, there are areas of surplus production in England and Wales which are as much exporting areas as Northern Ireland, the Irish Free State, France, Belgium and Holland, all of which enjoy relative propinquity to our markets here. From whatever standpoint regarded, it is clear that an immediate and rapid improvement in methods of marketing agricultural produce in England and Wales is necessary, if home produce is to be restored to the dominant position which it should hold, by right, in the home market.

It will be recalled that in 1924 the Linlithgow Committee expressed the view that it was of the utmost importance that the State should interest itself in the efficiency with which agricultural products are marketed and distributed, in the costs which these processes entail, and in the acquisition and dissemination of accurate information. In response to this recommendation, the Ministry of Agriculture has given, in the last two or three years, close attention to the subject of marketing.

The first task has been to study and to inform. The marketing environment of each commodity raised on British farms has been, or is being, carefully examined; as

the various investigations are concluded, Reports are issued in a special series of publications—the Economic Series. These Reports, with their orange-coloured covers, are becoming familiar to interested parties. I am told that, up to 30th June last, over 35,000 copies had been sold. The earlier Reports deal with such subjects as co-operative marketing, stabilization, co-operative buying and agricultural credit; later Reports are directed to the marketing conditions of specific commodities; of these, wool, potatoes, eggs, poultry, pigs and milk have been dealt with. The commodity Reports, issued at the nominal price of 6d., are not only descriptive, but some attempt is made, in a constructive spirit, to state, analyse and place in reasonable perspective the problems confronting both producer and distributor, and to point out directions in which improvement seems possible.

The Linlithgow Committee in its final Report commented on the lack of readily available information regarding the markets of the country, and recommended that data as to the control and ownership of markets should be officially collected and published, together with any relevant information likely to be useful. Since then a survey of the agricultural markets and fairs in England and Wales has been undertaken by the Ministry in connexion with, and as part of, the investigations referred to above. The results of the survey are being published in the Economic Series.

Two volumes have been issued: the first a general review of the position, the second dealing with the markets and fairs in the Midland Counties. More volumes are in preparation dealing with markets and fairs in the northern and southern counties, and other areas of the country. When complete, the several parts of the survey, taken together, will provide a much-needed reference-book of live stock and produce markets in England and Wales, of value not only to producers, but to market-owners and members of market-committees.

On the principle that an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory, the Ministry is following up the issue of the

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Reports referred to above by practical demonstration of the suggestions put forward in them. A number of demonstrations have already been given at agricultural shows during the present summer, as follows :—

<i>Show</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Subjects</i>
Oxfordshire . Bath and West	Oxford Bath	May 18 and 19 May 24 to 28	Eggs and Poultry Eggs, Poultry, Pigs and Fruit
Suffolk . . . Three Counties	Ipswich Worcester	June 2 and 3 June 7 to 9	Eggs and Poultry Fruit
Royal Cornwall	Truro	June 8 and 9	Eggs and Poultry
Lincoln . . .	Spalding	June 22 to 24	Eggs and Poultry
Royal . . .	Newport	July 5 to 9	Eggs, Poultry, Pigs and Fruit
Yorkshire . .	Darlington	July 19 to 21	Eggs, Poultry and Pigs
Royal Welsh .	Swansea	July 29 to August 2	Eggs, Poultry and Pigs

These demonstrations have aroused considerable interest. The “organize, standardize and advertise” policy, which is the basis of the demonstrations, has won favourable comment from many competent observers. The demonstrations are not at an end, they will be continued down to the end of the year, and will be given, among other places, at the London Dairy Show, the Imperial Fruit Show in Manchester, the Birmingham Fat Stock Show and the Smithfield Show.



CHAPTER XXXV

QUESTIONS OF POLICY

IT is impossible to go through England without arriving at some conclusions about agricultural needs and the fashion in which they are being met; it follows that some comparison of the various policies put before the public by political parties becomes inevitable. I think that the farmer whose concern for agriculture lies deeper than that of any political party might be inclined to say, with dying *Mercutio*: "A plague o' both your houses; I am sped." This attitude would be justified. We all know that when a political party approaches the agricultural situation it is tied to many considerations of which the agriculturist has no knowledge, and with which he has little real concern, and many of us must hold that the only way in which farming can be made an asset to the nation is by removing it entirely from the political arena. This, unfortunately, under our electoral system, is a counsel of perfection, and consequently it is necessary to consider what the contending parties offer and what on balance is likely to bring about agricultural regeneration. I would like to take the various questions in turn, starting with administration, which might well provide a fulcrum for reform.

Conservatives are opposed to compulsory control of cultivation, both the Liberal and Labour parties think differently. Labour would appoint County Agricultural Committees, with local Land Courts and a National Agricultural Commission. The Liberals would have a popularly elected Agricultural Authority in each county to advise and assist agriculturists, to take over badly managed or badly farmed land, and to administer agricultural credit; this Authority would be vested with compulsory powers. Both Labour and Liberal parties seem to be acting here in the best interests of agriculture. The old cry against interference from Whitehall is utterly insincere and dishonest, an appeal to ignorance and prejudice of which both authors

and supporters have reason to be ashamed. It is from Whitehall that the District Commissioners and County Advisers derive ; their work is not only sound in intention, widespread in scope and excellent in content, but it is so regarded by the great majority of intelligent agriculturists. The farmer is always asking for help of one kind or another, and that he should have material assistance without supervision is unthinkable. Moreover, he would be no better off if he could get it. Any subsidy, any scheme of control or national purchase that improved market-prices, would result in a little while, failing control or agricultural co-operation, in increased profit for the middleman.

Where afforestation is concerned there is nothing to choose between any parties ; all are satisfied as to the need, and the means of pursuing the work may vary in detail and yet reach the same goal. Where credits are concerned there is also some measure of agreement between the parties. Labour wants agricultural insurance, no other party asking for it ; but rightly or wrongly farmers will fight the suggestion to the last ditch. Some time ago I suggested to the then Minister of Agriculture that a system of compulsory insurance against Foot-and-Mouth Disease would enable farmers, at a very small cost, to build up a big reserve and to be sure that no Government will turn round one day and say to them : " We cannot afford to pay further compensation." I suggested, too, that insurance would serve to make a certain class of farmer more careful than it is at present. A committee, chiefly composed of farmers, was sitting just then to consider questions of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and the Minister asked me to put my suggestions forward. At no time in my life have I been received by any body of men with equal rudeness or greater hostility. It was not that they had any personal feeling against me—the chairman gave me this unsought assurance after the meeting—but it was because any suggestion that touched their pocket roused them to a state akin to hysteria. Yet my proposal, an insurance of which the burden should be borne as to 50 per cent. by the farmers and as to 50 per

cent. by the State, may prove in the end the way out of a grave financial difficulty.

Where agricultural wages are concerned, the Conservatives will maintain the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act. The Liberals would have Wages Committees to fix wages with direct reference to the cost of living of a family, and would assure to the agricultural worker a living wage, an untied cottage with garden, the right to half-an-acre of land, access to smallholdings and credit to make this access worth while. The Labour Party, while recognizing the agricultural worker's claim to an adequate standard of life, would give the worker a responsible place in the conduct of the industry, and this, as I see it, is utterly premature. The rank and file of agricultural labourers have neither the capacity nor the desire to take part in the actual handling of a farm; many would decline the responsibility were it offered to them. That there are exceptions goes without saying. A progressive farmer of my acquaintance once tried an experiment: he asked as many workers as cared to come forward to take over a certain amount of his land at the rent he paid for it, and to conduct their own farming operations, offering them the loan of his machinery and horses at bed-rock prices. After a time a dozen men came forward and accepted his offer—and on every occasion when there were two ways of doing a thing, came to him to know which they ought to follow. The educational facilities promised by the Labour Party must precede any active interest in the conduct of the farms, and on these grounds I am forced to think that the Liberal Policy is the better, and that Labour should study Ecclesiasticus xxxviii. 25, 26.

In the matter of education and research the Labour policy is fuller and more generous than that of the other parties, the Conservatives being limited and the Liberals too vague. Where game-laws are concerned the Conservatives of course will do nothing, and Labour and Liberal are more or less agreed. On the housing side the Liberals, with their Rural Housing Board, appear to have

gone more deeply into the question than any other party. On drainage all parties promise progressive measures. In the matter of land tenure Labour proposed State ownership, and this is surely a mistake, because the State cannot farm without the terrific loss that results from the knowledge that there is no personal responsibility. Farming, to be successful, needs the personal touch of a man who feels his interest in the land, and the Liberal policy of holding farms under a variety of tenures to meet different local conditions seems far more adapted to the actualities of the situation. Of these, cultivating tenure strikes a note of security, for the nation as a whole, and for the sound farmer as a citizen. The cultivating tenant has all the benefits and none of the burdens of ownership. I have discussed the question of nationalization throughout the length and breadth of England, and I cannot find one responsible man in close touch with the actualities of farming who says that nationalization provides a way out. The history of the agricultural settlements and colonies that the State has handled through the Ministry of Agriculture should be read and pondered by all who desire to see the land of England farmed officially.

Where marketing is concerned, the Labour Party proposes a public wheat service in the hands of an Import Board, but gives us no definite idea as to the fashion in which it would work. It is to deal with meat in much the same undefined way, and will even take over the milling industry on behalf of the nation. This last proposal is very promising, and seems better than the policy of either party, because at present the Liberals have not come to any decision as to the handling of the middleman problem and, if the evidence I have been able to gather on this journey is reliable, it is the middleman's stranglehold that is ruining the industry. Where Protection is concerned, all parties are agreed that there is nothing doing; in the matter of rates the Liberals hold the field with their system of rural rating.

I met along the road many farmers who ask that wheat

should be stabilized. Stabilization has caught the ear, it is a word as blessed as Mesopotamia just now, but nobody appears to know how the condition is to be brought about, or what precisely it means. In the old days certain clever people tried to call Home Rule for Ireland by the less offensive name of Devolution. *Verbum sap.*

In the matter of Rural Industries there is nothing to choose between the parties, all are rich in pious intention, and with regard to the sugar-beet industry the Liberal policy does not stand declared, but this may be mere political prudence. Transport finds all parties disposed to be progressive without being too committal.

Here then, in brief, is a simple analysis of the viewpoints of the three parties to the State in relation to the State's leading industry. The Conservatives from their standpoint are in great difficulties because they cannot, in view of their tradition, anticipate the national demand for drastic changes, their motto must needs be *festina lente*. The Labour Party, though it has some sound and progressive measures in its programme, is too urban in its outlook to be entirely dependable. In dealing with the great cities of the world you may be sure that Labour has a sound policy, because the men who lead the movement have been brought up among the actualities. They have seen, they have suffered, they know the national needs. But when we get to the country the case is altered, the brains of Labour have never been found behind the coulter, or in charge of a self-binder, or on the threshing-machine. You won't see the owners of these brains in the market-place trying to find a fair price for a sample of wheat or a pen of lambs or some fat beasts; where the farm is concerned they are amateurs, well-meaning but unversed, full of theories and profoundly ignorant of practice; they bring the cries of the town to the countryside and demand currency for them.

I do not for a minute think that this state of things will last. There is ample evidence that Labour is learning; the Rural Reconstruction League, which is largely Labour in its sympathies and outlook, is evidence of this, but agriculture

cannot endure the maintenance of existing conditions. The Liberal Party knows a lot about the land, there are many Liberals landlords and some of them have a tradition. Mr Lloyd George has a keener sympathy with the peasant than any Prime Minister who has held office in the time of living man; he did more for the agricultural labourer when he introduced Old Age Pensions than any of his predecessors had done or any of his successors have proposed to do. The Liberal examination into agricultural conditions, carried out over a term of years quite recently, has given us the best picture that has yet been painted of the condition into which the three parties to the agricultural contract have fallen, and when one considers the various programmes in the light of actuality, discounting their theoretical values, that of the Liberal Party appears, to the writer at least, to hold the greatest promise. The only real weakness is on the marketing side, and this is hard to understand, for a determined campaign against the abuses for which the rings, trusts, combines, and middlemen generally, are responsible would draw to the camp of any political party, not only the rank and file of agriculturists, but all the housewives of England.



